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A

# PRODIGIOUS FOOL.

BY

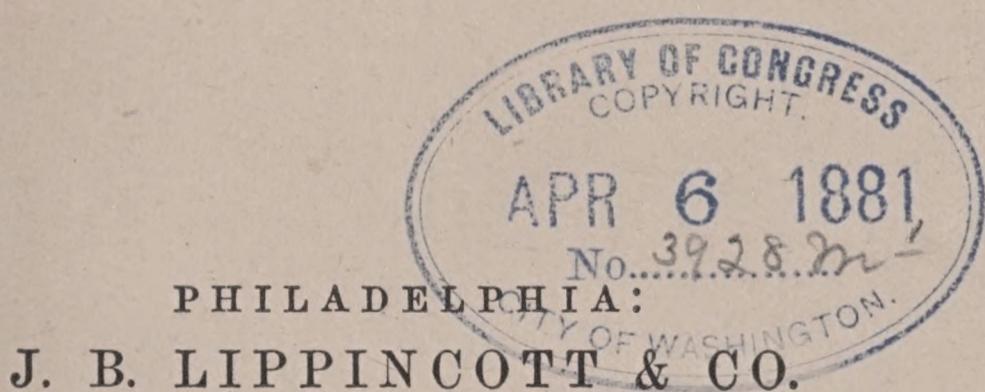
JOHN CALVIN WALLIS.

35

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A fool, a fool!—I met a fool,—  
A motley fool;—a miserable world!—  
As I do live by food, I met a fool.

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J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1881.

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“ High thought and amiable words, and courtliness, and the  
desire of fame, and love of truth, and all that makes a man.”

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# A PRODIGIOUS FOOL.

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## CHAPTER I.

“ Up I sprung—and upright stood on my feet.  
About me round I saw hill, dale, and shady woods,  
And sunny plains and liquid lapse of murmuring streams.  
By these, creatures that lived and moved and walked or  
flew,  
Birds on the branches warbling ;—all things smiled.”

*Milton’s Paradise Lost.*

SUMMER reigned at Slopingdale. May and June had come and gone, leaving their perfumed breath in the air, and now July was here with its oppressive heat. From the verdure-clad hills behind the old town, which promised a plentiful harvest, to the hovering trains on the horizon, which seemed to be waiting to carry that harvest to market, there was a general summer glow. The customary haze which was wont to obscure the view as it bore its freight of chills and fever on foggy wings had, for the time being, disappeared from the river. A slight breeze stirred aimlessly among the branches of the young water-willows along the shore, and

rippled the surface of the shallow river into an aqueous goose-flesh under the fervent heat of the blazing sun. Up and down the glistening river, and far across the noble farms of the bordering country, the view spread out unobscured and unobstructed, presenting to the beholder as fair a scene as rests beneath the sky. From the narrow strip of shoreland, along the tree-tops, across the fenced fields to the near mountains, spread a vision of green, gradually shaded up from the light pea-green of the grass growing on the gravel bar to the deeper tints of the willows and clover-fields, to the still deeper shades of the mountain woods in the distance. Right within the path of this verdant vision, and harmonizing perfectly with the prevailing tint of the landscape, stood a couple of lone fishermen just fresh from a joint and several experience of fisherman's luck.

Here on the banks of the brawling Susquehanna, on a spot of earth as fresh and fragrant as a flower, a little village of perhaps a hundred houses nestles on the sloping shore, while behind stretches a background of farming country in a pleasant vista of smiling fields and happy homes extending far across the hills, and still beyond all this, and fairly circling the horizon, rise the mountains, shaded from the nearest green to the distant blue, surrounding country, town, and river, and closing in the scene. Over this fair spot the unclouded sky

spans as blue as over storied Venice ;—the trees rustle, the river ripples, the birds sing,—and behold ! this is Slopingdale.

From this great hill behind the village one can look over the whole landscape,—can see the old town and the grass-grown river in its slow course, the grain-fields and watered meadows stretching far away to the feet of the mountains. Standing on this height, viewing the delightful prospect, one involuntarily exclaims, “ How like a perfect picture from the hand of God !”

Everything is still up here,—quiet as the graves whose white tombstones glitter in the sun down there among the tall pines in the village cemetery. Everything is peaceful, restful, sleepy ; the sail-boats move slowly through the water, the cars move slowly on the horizon, the people saunter slowly through the streets. These are the only visible signs of life, except a few cows in the meadows, a few birds in the sky, a few wagons creeping along the dusty road which winds now into and now out of view far away in the west, and except a motionless boy lying full length under the great oak on this greenest hill.

One likes the picture of that boy. There is a charm about him that arrests attention. His presence brightens the scene wonderfully. The whole world seems to hem him round and frame him in as though it loved him.

He seems to be a slender lad of weakly frame and modest manner as he lies there with great blue eyes looking out from under a broad, pale brow upon the beautiful country,—a slender boy with brown hair and smooth face; looking closer, with aquiline features, small hands and feet, and, possibly, mental nervous temperament; a slender boy of seventeen, dressed in ill-fitting but clean clothes, wearing a ten-cent straw hat, and possessing the tastes and sensibility of a woman; a slender boy, having the hand of a girl, the mind of a man, and the heart of a child!

Just such a boy like this must have been the philosopher and poet John Milton.

On reflection the resemblance could not possibly have extended farther than mere external appearance, for this boy's name is William Smith. Whoever heard of the world honoring with distinction anybody with such a name?

William Smith, clerk in the store of Gorham & Son, Market Square, Slopingdale, had gone on an errand to the country for the purpose, as directed by his employers, of "drumming up fresh eggs and butter," and, having completed his mission, was returning home, when the cool shade of the monster oak there on the hill-side enticed him to stop and rest. Perhaps the occupation of the day had not been pleasant, perhaps butter and eggs had "riz" or were "scerce," perhaps the search

for these valuable commodities had palled on the spirit as a thing far too small for the zeal of a human soul. Howbeit, the boy was out of humor and sighed deeply as he threw himself on the grass and looked around upon the familiar country. After a long look, in which, I fear, he saw little beauty in the scenery, he untied his necktie, unbuttoned his shirt-collar, and proceeded to read a book which he drew from his shirt-bosom.

In a couple of minutes he was oblivious of the world.

Time sped on, the shadows of the tree lengthened on the hill and crept through the fence into the farther field. The sun searched out and beat upon his face; still he read on. At length he finished and closed the book, placing it again in his bosom, and rose upon his elbow with a bright look beaming in his eyes.

He had read the New Testament History of Christ, finishing with the temptations in the wilderness, where the Saviour deliberately determines not to use His supernatural power to accomplish His work in the world, but, on the contrary, to found His great empire on the love of mankind, by devoting His terribly pure life to doing them good,—an act which seemed to the reader, just then, more than aught else to endear the name of Jesus to sinning man.

Those temptations had long been mysterious

things to the boy, as well as to many other and older good people, but he believed he understood them now,—understood them as temptations that came not alone to the Master, but that come some time to every aspiring human mind,—temptations to sin in various ways, always hard to resist, but to be overcome as the Master overcame them,—by trust in God and doing our duty towards our fellow-men.

The lesson was needful just at the time. How often had he fretted his soul against the narrow barriers of his life, like a bird against its cage, in the vain effort to escape from the confined condition in which Providence or a hard fate had placed him! Had he not to-day even coolly entertained the thought that it might after all, perhaps, be a good thing to leap down that chasm in the hills among those sharp-pointed rocks and so disappear from the living? And why should he live? Was not his life one wild throbbing tumult of desire never to be gratified or satisfied? Was it not one vast maelstrom of seething ambition never to be quelled or stilled? Was it not a constant battle with self, making existence a misery and death a relief?

No, the boy was not crazy. He was only thoughtful, sensitive, ambitious,—the kind of soul always and everywhere doomed to the most restless discontent and the keenest unhappiness. To

have been born an idiot would have been better in one sense, for it would have brought unalloyed contentment. The boy having been gifted with finer qualities and endowments, and feeling sensible of their possession, though at the same time not knowing how to use or enjoy them, he became miserable.

The thought that the Master had felt as he did and had conquered the feeling stilled the unrest within him, and calmed him, for the moment, to a sense of thankfulness for life ; he would conquer, too, by God's help !

The evening deepened, and he stood up in the gathering twilight. There was trust, confidence, hope, in his face as he leaned against the tree and spoke aloud,—

“ What a beautiful world ! And I am alive in it,—alive and created to enjoy it. Why, I ought to be happy and not miserable. These feelings that stir up my soul and make me unhappy are not from God but from the devil. They are temptations, and must be conquered and overcome. I will conquer them. How often I have rebelled against Heaven, and thought it cruel that I was ever sent into this world, unasked and by force, to pass a narrow life in this solitary spot ! How often I have longed to go out into the great world lying beyond these circling mountains, where action, conflict, joy, are to be found ! My tempta-

tion is discontent with my lot. This I must overcome. Patiently I must strive and wait, and perhaps some time I shall conquer, and all will be well."

But even as he spoke the joy faded out of his face as the day out of the sky, and a frown gathered on his brow and his eyes flashed with the fire of gathering feelings which would not be repressed. He looked around him at world and sky as only an ardent soul can look when moved by the spirit of youth. The change was instantaneous, its expression electric.

"No," he cried, resolutely; "I will not believe that my soul's best strivings, its fairest wishes, and grandest hopes are from the Evil One; I cannot believe it; I can never overcome these feelings. Temptations they may be, but I know that I shall ever feel thus,—it is my nature. God,—God formed me with these feelings; He sent me into the world with them, He gave me my soul, He fills it with this longing, *He made me, not the devil!*"

And so the sad hour of conflict with himself came upon the boy, coming to him, as it comes to all of us some time in our lives, in a form seemingly the severest and most unendurable. It seemed to him impossible that he should be required to relinquish his dearest wishes and give up his best hopes. It looked horrible. He could not live without hope. "Man liveth not by bread

alone, but by every word which proceedeth from God," rung in his ears. It was true, then, that aims, desires, purposes, hopes, were permitted. If necessary to man who should say that they were not from God?

At length he sank on his knees and prayed,—

"O Father in heaven, look kindly upon thy child; teach him to know and do Thy will; help him to live right; make his spirit resigned towards Thee and strong against the world, and protect and save him, for Christ's sake. Amen."

Happy indeed are they whose soul conflicts leave them the victors! Battle with the world is hard enough, and many are overcome in the unequal contest. Still there is a strength born of such a battle,—born of a grapple with tangible things,—which grows fresher and stronger with every rebound. In the soul's struggle there is no such discipline. The wrestler in such a contest has no foothold. Like a storm-blown ship amid the breakers, tossed to and fro at the mercy of the waves, the poor soul floats helplessly to its fate, with no pilot to direct its course and without an anchor that holds.

The sun had disappeared below the hills, leaving a lane of gold far into the clouded sky like a path into heaven. Soon the air began to chill, growing cool and damp with the falling dew. One by one the sorrowful stars crept into view, beamed,

glinted, glittered, until the blue depths of creation blazed with jewelled splendor.

The boy arose to go down into the village. He felt conscious that in his struggle he had not conquered, and that other days would witness the renewed conflict. Standing there on the hill as still as nature itself, with the weird silence of a virgin world around him, the possession of conscious life seemed a dreadful burden and responsibility, and the question of how to use it, how not to abuse it, an unanswered and unanswerable problem. In after-years he came to know that "true bliss is found in holy life, in charity to man, in love to God," but just then it seemed impossible of attainment, or at best to come only through resignation to Heaven and struggle against the world.

With a determined look he set his face towards the village, where tallow candles were beginning to shine from the windows, and stepped out into the night, and as he did so he heard a movement in the branches of the old oak ; another, and right above his head.

The boy was not superstitious in the ordinary acceptation of the term ; he was rather skeptical than otherwise. He never had believed in ghosts, popular as such a belief was in Slopingley. He took pride in being above such a weakness. That movement in the tree, however, startled him as something eerie and supernatural.

He stood rooted to the earth, peering through the night into the branches, listening. Could it have been the wind? There was no wind, not a breath in the air. Was it imagination? No, he could not be mistaken, there was *something* moved up there; what was it?

He stood motionless. The night was not very dark, but there was no moon, and all objects were darkly outlined against the sky,—the tree with its luxuriant foliage and low sweeping branches rising colossal before the strained expectant gaze.

Perfect silence.

Gradually but surely the sense of a *presence* obtruded upon the wondering mind and made the anxious heart beat faster; it grew stronger, passing rapidly from suspicion into belief, from belief to conviction, from conviction to certainty. Was it a ghost?

The watchful gaze dropped to the level of the horizon with the dreadful thought; it turned slowly, irresolutely, irresistibly to the near graveyard, where the white stones here and there discernible seemed stepping out towards the hill from the horrid shades.

I think all men have some time suffered from fear; and I believe, furthermore, that all except cowards will acknowledge it. The difference between a brave man and a coward is, after all, only a difference in fortitude,—it is simply a question

of *nerve*. The brave man feels fear as well as the coward, but he stands up under it, while the coward lies down or runs away.

William Smith, it must be confessed, was afraid, but, thanks to courage, he stood up under the feeling. He would have stood his ground if the sheeted dead had risen, and filed past with clanking bones and grinning skulls.

Once in his watch he thought he heard the leaves rustle and saw a limb bend down and sway up and down. This was followed by an impression of an outline of some object resting on that limb,—something shadowy with drapery about it. It did not move when he looked again, and he thought it was only imagination.

But casting another glance into the tree now at that spot, it was with amazement that he saw the limb sway up and down more distinctly than before; he could distinctly hear it *creak* as it moved. The object too moved, plainly moved as he looked.

Fully determined now to end the mystery, he cried out,—

“Whoever, whatever you are, come down out of that and show yourself!”

The nerves were a little unsteady, but the voice was clear and ringing.

Clear and ringing came the reply from the tree,—

“I will; it’s awful tiresome up here. You’ll

help me down, won't you? Although I got up all alone, it's not so easy getting down."

"It's a girl!" muttered William, too much astonished to speak aloud. The revulsion of thought produced mingled feelings of surprise, anger, and disgust. Not the least unpleasant of these feelings came from the reflection that she must have heard everything he said in her perch up on that tree. What was she doing there anyway? It was certainly a most unheard-of proceeding,—perfectly preposterous.

But there was small time for consideration of the situation or for indulgence in reflections and conjectures. William had scarcely began to grumble and complain before the mass of drapery commenced to sway about and move downwards through the foliage. It descended rapidly from limb to limb until it rested, a light and airy mass of skirts and flounces, on the lowest branch, where it revealed dimly through the dusk the flashing eyes, smiling face, and full form of a young woman. She hung there, holding fast with one hand and extending the other downwards, entreatingly,—

"Oh, please catch me; do,—quick!"

A strong, firm grasp, a jump, a scream, a sudden swing from tree to earth, and she stood there beside him, the most substantial and merry ghost that ever dropped from a tree; but he nearly let her fall in his sudden recognition and astonishment.

“Why, Jennie!”

“Well?”

“Is it possible?”

“Quite possible, William. Please get my hat off that twig; no, the one above that,—there. I believe my face is scratched, and my hands are sore, I know. Now, if ever I climb a tree again I want to be informed, that’s all.”

“But——”

“Now, please don’t; I’m distressed awfully. Do let’s go home. How late it’s getting!”

She took his arm, but he stood still.

“Oh, you are not angry?”

The question was asked with two beautiful eyes peering into his face and a charming mouth near his own. She lightly put his hair back from his brow with a soft little hand, then, suddenly and woman-like, became exceedingly merry.

“You see,” she went on, innocently, unheeding the dark looks of her companion,—perhaps she couldn’t see his face plainly,—“you see, I never meant to let you know that I was there, and I tried hard not to listen or hear what you were saying, and I wanted the worst way to be still as a mouse, but you stayed so long, and I got so tired, and that limb would try to throw me off, and—*creak*,—and—and—so you see I couldn’t help your finding me.”

And the little woman executed such a bewitch-

ing movement of impatience, and brought her fresh face so near her companion's, and looked altogether so sweet under the starlight, that the general effect began to tell on her companion. He wouldn't have been a man if it hadn't told. Gradually his frown relaxed and his lips opened, —it was clear that she would bring him round.

“But,” persisted he, “what were you doing up there? why were you here at all,—here up a tree like a monkey?”

“Must I tell?”

That was a poser. However, he decided the question in a summary way,—a man's way.

“Yes, you must.”

“Well, *I climbed it for fun.*”

“For fun! Climbing trees for fun; a pretty fun that is for a young lady. Jennie, I'm surprised at you.”

“You needn't be.”

“But I am; really I am.”

“Oh, the other girls climbed it too.”

“The *other* girls?”

“Yes.”

“What other girls?”

“Mame Bartlett, Sally Chichester, and Lucy Brown; they ran away and left me on the tree when they saw *you* coming up the road. I think it was real mean.”

“Oh!”

“They shouldn’t have run off, I think.”

“No, certainly not.”

“And I’m going to tell them what I think, too. I do think they were real mean.”

“So do I ; and then *I* kept you up there listening to a lot of rubbish for a couple of hours. Why, you must be wearied out standing here. Come, I’ll take you home. See here, Jennie, look in my eyes again as you did a moment ago.”

“Oh, William !”

“Please do.”

But this really reasonable request was refused. An air of embarrassment now seized upon the young lady ; she walked at his side with bowed head in silence. They walked slowly through the dark. He looked at her tenderly, and felt every charm of her grace and beauty. She, fully conscious that he was looking at her, experienced the joy of being admired ; and so, the normal relationship of man and woman being correctly established, they silently passed over the darkened hill and down into the straggling village.

Their thoughts were busy with each other during the walk, and the singularity of their meeting was forgotten. But when at length they stopped before the door of a little cottage shaded by a mammoth oak, and she slipped her hand gently from his sleeve, the ludicrousness of the situation appealed to both at the same instant.

She bounded up the steps of the porch laughing: "I declare it is all too funny for anything; I never heard of such a thing before."

"Nor I," laughed he. "I'm thinking though the girls will plague us; what do you think?"

"I don't care," she answered, archly, as he tried to find the door-latch. "What did you think of me?"

"You? I think you an angel!"

"Pshaw! I mean what did you think I was up that tree?"

"Oh, I thought you a ghost; but what did you think I was,—a fool, eh?"

Her hand was upon the door-latch and her face was lifted to his.

"No."

"What, then?"

She lifted the latch.

"A hero! Good-night."

He held her hand one short moment while the door was softly opened, kissed it; she entered, and the door softly closed against him standing alone on the porch.

## CHAPTER II.

FAUST. "Knowest thou, then, all my wishes?"

DEVIL. "—And will leave them in the consummation far behind."

FAUST. "How! If thou wert to bear me to the uttermost stars,—to the uppermost part of the uppermost,—shall I not bring a human heart along with me, which in its wanton wishes will nine times surpass thy flight? Learn from me that man requires more than God and devil can give."—*Müller's Faust*.

THE name William Smith being a very ordinary and common name it is to be expected that its possessor should be a very ordinary and common person. And so he is.

In some respects, it is true, he greatly differed from those about him. He seldom exhibited the prevalent disposition and general habits of the average boy. He never romped in games, never played truant, never robbed birds' nests, never went fishing on Sunday, never even pelted the bald head of the teacher with paper pellets. I fear that he utterly failed to come up to reasonable expectations in these and akin pastimes. Perhaps he was too obedient and exemplary. He was whipped at school once, a severe whipping it

was too, but it was because he took the blame upon himself really belonging to another and suffered in his friend's stead. And that other boy stood close by all the while and patiently saw his self-sacrificing friend well whipped without opening his mouth!

To the same peculiar disposition might properly be attributed some singular habits. Though sickly from infancy the boy never complained. He came and went bearing his sufferings in silence. For himself and his own comfort he cared little. His slender figure could be seen day after day trudging along the country road to school or church in all kinds of weather. It could be seen wading through the snow carrying some favorite story-book to a sick companion. This exposure was general among boys, to be sure, but not generally owing to the same motive,—a strong sense of duty and the desire to help others.

It was observable that the boy sought his pleasures in contemplation, study, and the commendation of teacher and friends. He preferred passive to active enjoyments. When his comrades played boisterously at various games he stood near by watching them, but not joining in their sport. In the winter-time he caught many a cold in the head standing for hours out-doors watching the skaters flying over the ice. So also in summer, when picnic-parties filled the woods, he would be present,

seemingly taking pleasure in the fun of others ; but while they were noisy he was quiet, while they mingled in companionship he stood aloof, to wander away, perhaps, at length into the shady grove, where alone and buried in reflection, lying on the moss, he would play like a child with the pebbles and the grass near his hand, while his eyes and his thoughts were far away among the clouds above the rustling trees.

When afterwards he grew along into his teens his timidity and sensitiveness to observation grew yet more pronounced and striking. His nature, like a sensitive plant, shrunk from the touch and withdrew itself into seclusion. There were occasions when his modesty dropped from him like a garment,—if some good cause was poorly defended or decried, or some bad cause well championed and upheld, none were so quick to stand up for the right, and none so sure to leave a scar on the wrong thing. His soul, thoroughly devotional, could endure no unjust thing. The good, the true, and the beautiful appealed to him trumpet-tongued for recognition and vindication everywhere and at all times. Thus, from the lisping days of childhood through the rugged ways of youth, he grew a spiritual soul.

The boy possessed also a good stock of moral courage, a quality somewhat scarce in the world in these days. He had that essential element of

manhood commonly known and described as backbone.

Is it possible for a human being to make amends for lack of backbone?

Modern science has given new proof of man's high destiny by showing that he sprung right up from the lowest created object to the highest,—developed from the mollusk to the immortal. A new science will have to be written to show the destiny of a creature who, starting as a man, retrogrades to an oyster,—falling from an immortal vertebrate to a spineless pulp!

Yet it is strictly true that William Smith's reputation in the village at every period of his young life was quite unenviable, and, indeed, to speak the whole truth at once, it never in later and maturer years got much better. In spite of the amiable characteristics referred to possessed by that young gentleman, in spite of a spirit which burnt like a flame when aroused, or, perhaps, because of these things, the village conceived a palpable dislike for the boy, and consequently his companions were unappreciative and his friends few. Not that there was any positive persecution of the boy or open hostility freely expressed. Nobody actually hated him; the feeling was rather one of indifference,—a sort of disregard of his existence. People who took so much trouble as to notice him smilingly observed, "That youngster 'll

niver sit the river afire," thus in one sentence expressing an equal contempt for the boy and the English grammar. It might be remarked also that at the same time a cheerful turn was given to gossip by speculations on the probabilities of the boy's early death. The women quietly watched him, wondering why he didn't die. The object of this tender solicitude read the question in the looks cast on him,—read it in the eyes of the questioners as plainly as if they had spoken it.

"It's agin Proverdence that he survives when his face is so pale, his chist so narrer, and his body so thin," remarked the sympathizing Matilda Johnson. And the irrepressible Matilda immediately resumed slandering her neighbors, from which congenial occupation her astonishment at the boy's persistence in living had temporarily diverted her vigorous mind.

Possibly this treatment was the price exacted out of recompense for fine feelings. Nature bestows no gift without demanding compensation. Along with every pleasure is linked a pain, with every joy a sorrow. To the sensitive spirit of the dreaming enthusiast come many miseries all through life, none of which are more unpleasant and painful than to be misunderstood and unappreciated.

Colonel Erastus S. Swampus in forcible diction condemned the general judgment. "It's a d—n

shame, and you'll see that boy make you all sorry fur such treatment yet," said the colonel. But as the colonel, though perfectly honest, had unfortunately a bad reputation for truth, his prophecy was disregarded. The doctor gave an accurate diagnosis of the colonel's complaint when he said, "The colonel exhibits premonitory symptoms of telling the truth, but he never actually tells it."

Certain well-ascertained traits of Mr. Gorham, Sr., long known through hard experience, prepared William Smith to anticipate a reception from that gentleman when he should appear in the store next morning. He was not disappointed.

The store was open, the shutters removed, the floor swept, and Gorham & Son's clerk was ready for business. Mr. Gorham had not yet appeared. The clerk stood leaning against the door looking at the sunrise.

"Oh—you're there—are ye?"

It was Mr. Gorham himself. He had come in very quietly,—noiselessly, in fact,—and now stood two yards away glaring at his clerk as if astonished to see him.

Receiving no reply further than a look of startled recognition, he stepped briskly to his desk and there renewed the contemplation of his clerk, looking over spectacles which were perched on the very end of his long nose and momentarily threatened

to slip their frail hold. Those spectacles always gave the clerk a spasm of nervous chill.

“P’—raps ye’ll deign to extend us—information—as to y’r whereabouts last evenin’?” began Mr. Gorham, satirically. “P’—raps it might be well—and not too much fur us to ask,—ef not inconvenient to ye,—to ask—to ask—what do you mean anyhow, eh?”

When Mr. Gorham wished to be particularly severe he tried to be sarcastic, always beginning his remarks in a slow and ponderous bass and ending them quickly, and not always intelligibly, in a high treble, interspersing in the mean while a profusion of plural pronouns along his track of speech. Mr. Gorham was called a close man, not stingy,—a careful, saving, close man. He had been once detected in removing the sugar from the feet of a fly which had trespassed in the sugar-drawer, so it was reported, and that provident act was circulated to the undoing of his fair reputation. But whatever might be said of his parsimony in all other matters, it was freely confessed that in the matter of plural personal pronouns he was liberal.

The effect of Mr. Gorham’s speech upon his auditor was not always satisfactory, neither to himself nor to the one addressed; it was often the exact reverse of what he intended; just now it was ludicrous.

The clerk restrained himself with difficulty from laughing. He turned half-way round and gave Mr. Gorham his profile before replying. He spoke his uppermost thoughts.

"I went on my errand, and—did my work. I was unexpectedly detained, and didn't get back till the store was closed."

What business of *his* was it to know of last night's adventure? None. He would not have told it to him if a thousand lies were necessary to keep it from him. The very thought of disclosing so sacred a secret to *him* seemed sacrilegious.

He turned and looked squarely at Mr. Gorham : "I really did not think I should be wanted here last evening,—this morning—or—or any time."

The words would come. After having spoken them he felt easier ; Mr. Gorham should have the truth in one particular at any rate.

"Tut, tut, tut, didn't think!" replied Mr. Gorham, impatiently. "You never think. No. You don't care 'bout *our* interests. Y'r thoughts are not given to *us*. *We* have not the benefit of 'em. No. Ye keep 'em to y'r—self. What d'—ye s'—pose y'r here *fur* anyhow, eh?"

What, indeed? It was a question which the clerk had often asked himself and never had been able to answer. He could not answer it now. He only looked at the metallic face frowning upon him. It rose before him horribly like a nightmare

in dreams. It stood out from all objects like a bas-relief in a frame. Abstractedly he watched that face, seeing every hard wrinkle in the red flesh, looking into the small glittering eyes gleaming upon him like a snake, contemplating those heavy features relieved slightly by the gray locks about the large ears, fascinated by the great nose holding fast—apparently by some occult magnetism—the spectacles which ever threatened to fall.

Mr. Gorham grew uneasy under the close inspection. He disliked exceedingly being examined in that way by his clerk. It suggested the calm contemplation by a spectator at an animal show.

“I’ll tell you what, Mr. Youngster,” proceeded Mr. Gorham, becoming exasperated: “ye’ll hev to have a settlement with us one of these days and be well rubbed down fur y’r imperdence; ye’ll hev to change them keerless ways o’ yourn. What are ye a-staring at, eh? are ye asleep? I say ye’ll hev to be more lively and spry about the business. Ye’ll hev to tend to business better,—read less books and wait on more customers. Ye’ll hev to work less with y’r mind and more with y’r hands. Ha! ha! ha! indeed ye will. Ye’ll hev to do y’r work prompt and quick, ez ef y’r heart was in it. We won’t hev enny more book readin’ in the store durin’ business hours, mark it; no more loiterin’ on errands; no more day dreamin’,—it’s unprofitable,—it’s disagreeable to us. We are determined

not to—to submit to it enny longer, and ye'll hev to—to stoppit."

And the perspiring Mr. Gorham, having spoken his mind, turned snappishly to his ledger and hastily leafed over its pages, lifting his head at an angle of forty-five degrees in the effort to see each page through the glasses on the end of his nose.

Mr. Gorham's clerk recovered his wandering thoughts and walked to the end of the store, arranging the goods as he went. He said nothing; what was the use? In a mechanical way he went about his duty. He leisurely inspected the sugar and coffee drawers, the tea and rice canisters; those that needed supply he filled from the stores in the cellar. In the same listless manner he stood hardware before the door to attract customers,—the same old pick and shovel, rake and ploughshare which had served in such capacity for many a year. He journeyed to the garret by easy stages of deliberate steps and brought thence some needed lots of ready-made clothing, which he displayed in fresh packages in the store. The regular announcement by placard on these occasions of "a new arrival of fresh goods just received" was a bit of mercantile fiction which sat lightly on the Gorham conscience. It was not altogether fiction, either, for certainly the goods had in fact "newly arrived" and were "fresh"—from the garret. Having finished his work for the time being, the clerk took his seat on

a nail-keg near the window and looked out into the quiet street.

It was a charming morning. The shadow of the store lay far across the street, lapping the lawn in the town square. The air came cool and exhilarating through the open window,—the birds twittering in the trees bordering the pavement. The old road over the hill, travelled yesterday, was plainly visible, its white sand shining in the morning sun. It seemed to beckon and say, “Come with me over the hills and far away to other scenes and another life; come and enjoy happier days!”

Suddenly the current of the clerk’s thoughts changed. He became sensibly conscious that he wanted breakfast. At the same moment another idea impressed him. He knew that he was watched. He had not moved: he could not see into the store; he did not turn, but he felt, plainly *felt* that Mr. Gorham was looking at him. When he did turn he caught Mr. Gorham’s eye bent upon him.

“We s’—pose now that ye didn’t curry the horse this mornin’, eh?” queried Mr. Gorham.

“No, sir; not yet.”

“Um! no; *we* thought so. Well, arter ye are quite rested, when y’r fatigue is past, and ye no longer suffer from y’r over-exertion and severe labors, maybe ye might ez well—as well curry him,—thet is, of course, ef y’r not too tired or—or lazy.”

And Mr. Gorham smiled in a way that suggested cramps as the clerk sauntered out of the store. As the door closed his parting injunction was heard,—

“And be sure that ye curry his belly well.”

And this was the way the day opened.

And so and so and so went on the struggle, ever renewed, never ceasing, day after day through all the weary years,—the old struggle of a human soul battling with the ever real in vain strivings to attain the unattainable ideal.

I fear that very little breakfast was eaten by the clerk that morning, very little work done that day. The demon of unrest was busy in that hot young breast conjuring up a host of lesser demons to torment him. They whispered dissatisfaction while he measured the calico or weighed the sugar ; they prompted aggressiveness as he counted eggs or drew molasses ; they inspired the sweetest satisfaction in the simple acts of punching holes in mackerel and leaving the vinegar faucet open. Thus the day passed.

The evening found him at his favorite spot for reverie and dreams. How often had he been there in the summer days long since gone ? It was that greenest hill, back of the village sloping towards the narrow road that skirted its base, on which he rested yesterday. There he repaired as the sun went down. Lying there on the grass

under the shade of the oak, overpowered by turbulent emotions, he watched the birds circling in the purple sky, the creeping teams crawling snail-like in the dusty road, the shallow river slipping like threads of silver between the islands and through the gates of the mountains. In other times the scene gave him pleasure; of late it only made him miserable. It was plain that its power to charm was gone. Nay, it fed the flame that he would extinguish. For lying there, seeing all that peacefulness and quiet, his thought flew dove-like away to the great active world so close about him and yet unseen and unknown, containing the great cities and the grand life of men, of which he knew so little and yearned to know all. A great longing for that great world seized upon his soul. It took possession of him, rising within him like a sob, until he could no longer endure the sight of the lazy calm of nature. Everything around him, all the beauty of meadow, hill, and stream, oppressed him with the everlasting sameness of creation. He could not stay there. Rising excitedly and hastily striding over the hill, he took his swift way through the twilight down into the village, resolved once for all to find a way, some way, out of it,—out of it into that magnificent world and life beyond those mountains, to do great deeds there and make a name to be trumpeted round the world.

## CHAPTER III.

“ When all the world is young, lad, and all the trees are green,  
And every goose a swan, lad, and every lass a queen,  
Then heigh for boot and horse, lad, and round the world  
away,—  
Young blood must have its course, lad, and every dog  
his day.”—KINGSLEY.

INTO the question of the merit of a human being must ever enter that other inquiry as to his opportunity. If opportunity has been great the merit of achievement is correspondingly small; if small the merit is great.

Thus, too, the better qualities of a person, such as are acknowledged to be just, noble, grand, are rarely such because of their abstract excellence when separated from the possessor, but are so designated and really earn their dignity because possessed by that particular person.

Of William Smith it could well be said that he owed nothing to training, education, or the influence of and association with the people. If there was any good at all in him it sprung spontaneously out of the nature God had given him. His youthful education as well as his associations never did him a scintilla of benefit, physically, mentally, or

morally. The direct opposite was the result. From childhood up his life was a hard battle with the world,—a severe struggle against the cruellest adverse circumstances.

It was under the pressure of his later restless moments that he remembered all the dreary period of his childhood with a newer pang of sorrow.

Often the past like a moving picture unrolled before his mind, until he saw with startling vividness all the prominent experiences of his life: how, when he was only two years of age, his father died, and he, poor boy, was left to the sole care of his mother, a poor woman obliged to earn her own and her child's support with her needle upon the tailor's bench; how, at six years of age, owing to the accession of a stepfather to the little family, he attained to that anomalous position in the household of being placed out-doors,—a trying situation for one of his tender years; how, for the next eight uneventful years, he lived with his grandfather in the country,—the country, where the air and good victuals are alike rare,—where, segregated from congenial companionship and denied the needs of a growing child, he passed a melancholy life. How well he remembered all this now! How well he remembered the dreary void of life in that country home, where no lessons of counsel and encouragement from parents or friends ever came; where no mother's love was ever told

and no mother's kindness ever known! In all the weary waste of that perished period of time he had never knelt at his mother's knee. To say that he had been *raised* was to perpetrate an aggravated solecism; he had grown, simply *grown*, —grown wild and rank like a weed, as neglected and about as useless.

And yet it seemed to him that all else might have been forgiven had not his schooling been neglected. To deny to him education, that thing of all things most necessary, seemed a piece of gratuitous cruelty bordering on the brutal.

His schooling began when he was ten years old, and for three years thereafter he attended school, —a continuous term altogether of one year and a half in a backwoods school, distributed through three months of summer and three months of winter during each year. The instruction thus received taught him to spell, read, write, and to solve the simpler problems of arithmetic. This was deemed all-sufficient. For when his mind began to develop to understanding, and tuition became most needful because knowledge was easier understood and better remembered, it was discovered by those who called themselves his friends that he was of a proper age to care for himself by earning his own living. And thus it was that the school-house closed its doors upon him and the store opened its doors to him.

As the tender leaves of the plant reach out for the sunshine so the soul of the boy reached out through all those dark years for sympathy,—reached out and was denied.

And now a country store is to become the arena of his efforts and form the foundation of his worldly fortune; its close and lowly walls are to shut in and confine his spirit, and its dull, incessant, and belittling duties to claim the strong activities of his young life.

He sat behind the counter one day thinking of this prospect. How dreadful it looked!

With a sort of resistless fascination he gazed on the picture presented to his mind as it wound and unwound, twisted and untwisted itself like a serpent horrible to the sight and poisoning the air with its breath.

The picture went on unfolding.

He shall have no other life but this. He shall work daily from early dawn till late at night at uncongenial labor; he shall not sleep,—the sweetest slumbers shall be broken every morning before the dawn of day by the shrill call of an imperative master; he shall scrub, dust, and sweep, like a maid-of-all-work; he shall run errands and fetch and carry, like any other servant; he shall worry, fret, and fume, and strive for release in vain; he shall get reproofs, and be obliged to be patient under indignities; he shall exhaust his strength

and kill his soul with this abominable work through the coming years as he had been doing through the past three years, for what?—*his board and clothes!*

Why, this was slavery!

And could he ever become a man by such means?

Never.

It was impossible.

But he would become a man in spite of it all; ay, in spite of everything.

He rose to his feet and walked up and down the store reflecting. Could he devise any means to get away? That was the only remedy. He must somehow get away. The prospect was truly discouraging. He had no friends to help him. There was no promise for him anywhere. He possessed a total capital of thirty dollars with which to begin life. What could he do and how should he do it?

The store was deserted by customers and he was alone. Out upon the lawn a bevy of little children played. The sun was sinking on golden pillows in the west, the crest of the hills outlined like a red flame against the streaked sky.

Suddenly he paused in his walk. He had reached a resolve. It was a brave one. He made it hesitatingly at first, but the more he examined and tested it the more he desired to carry it out.

He would go to New York City. He would go there and work and toil for success,—going as he had read that grand soul Horace Greeley went, a strange, uncouth, uneducated country boy, without means or friends. He would, like him, so labor and learn, so advance and prosper, that in time all that which the world calls success would be his. He was resolved.

When to go? how to break the news to his employers? whether, or not, he would be brought back if he ran away? and what to do when he got to New York?—these were all pregnant inquiries present to his mind, together with others, and extremely difficult to settle. Still, he held to his resolve.

Time wore on. The harvests were gathered. The warm summer days were slowly shading into autumn and the nights were getting cold. From the trees the green drapery had disappeared, and now the slender branches bared themselves to nakedness as they dropped withered and dying their brown, russet, and golden leaves.

There was to be a picnic in the woods, in the great grove back of the village, all the Sunday-schools participating. The children were marshalled on the lawn of the town-square early in the day and drilled, then started, in a curious procession, marching through the streets to the music of fife and drum, and so back over the hills

and down into the welcome old woods. The village took a holiday to witness the sight. It was interesting because the families were few that did not have a child or two somewhere in the ranks. The march was orderly enough through the village and for some distance beyond, but on nearing the woods the natural instinct prevailed over propriety, and the children broke ranks without orders, and forthwith played the untamed colt. Thenceforth throughout the day the woods rang with their happy voices and the hill-side echoed back the joyful noise. Of course, the edibles disappeared rapidly. The lemonade more rapidly. The ice-cream seemed to have strangely shrunk in quantity—in quality perhaps it could not—in the transportation, so quickly and so surely did it vanish. The swings swung, the dancers danced, and the players played through the happy day. There was joy for the children in every hour, and the evening came all too soon.

A pretty group of grown and half-grown girls stood conversing in the shadow of a tent under a leafy tree. The tallest and fairest was telling her companions something amusing, for they laughed. How handsome she looked, her face all aglow with excitement and pleasure! Tall, dark-eyed, red-cheeked, possessing the form of Juno and an expression like Diana, she stood there in the exuberance of her girlish charms the very picture

of a village beauty. She seemed scarcely sixteen ; although her abundant hair, black as the night, and a fully-developed figure betokened the woman. The sun shining through a rift in the foliage covered her for a moment, lighted up her motionless figure, and she shone like an angel.

The distinguished title of “the belle of the village” had been by common consent bestowed upon Jennie Carey, and she had borne that weighty honor for several years ; but, whether because of its questionable merit or by reason of modesty, the young lady herself thought little of the title. Still, while blessed with this distinction, she had never before presented so charming an appearance. She was dressed sensibly for a picnic, and wore a plain white muslin dress looped up just enough to give her feet a chance in the woods, and at the same time, I fear, to artistically display an embroidered petticoat and suggest a neat foot and ankle. Her hair hung down about her pretty rounded shoulders confined only by the restraint of a narrow crimson ribbon. In her hand she held a dainty bit of a straw hat, and as she stood playfully caressing the fresh roses among its ribbons her long dark eyelashes swept her cheeks. When she looked up her companions were gone, and she was standing there under the trees alone.

Aimlessly, perhaps, she turned and wandered

away, still deeper and deeper into the shadows of the woods, till she reached a great green mound covered with moss under the spreading branches of a monster maple. There she threw herself recumbent on the moss and looked down through the serried ranks of trees upon the playing children.

“Tired, Jennie?”

The voice was musical and low, but it was so close to her ear that she was startled into an exclamation of surprise.

“Tired, Jennie?”

Turning quickly, she met the glance of the intruder. But it was a pleasant look,—a not unwelcome presence that she saw.

“Why, William, how you frightened me!”

“Did I?”

“Indeed, you did. You came so quiet,—and suddenly. Won’t you sit down? It’s a delightful spot, isn’t it?”

“It is, indeed.”

There is a transforming power in love that changes all things to its own color and into sweetest accord and sympathy with itself. If love be there even the desert will blossom like the rose!

That wild and tangled collection of brush and trees had never before possessed any special marks of attractiveness; it was only an old forest. Now it teemed with sylvan charms.

It was a beautiful place certainly, to judge by

the sparkling eyes that looked down the vista and returned delighted to her.

Jennie felt the roses in her cheeks grow a deeper red under that look, grow crimson as her companion threw himself on the moss by her side and looked lovingly up into her face, saying,—

“Jennie, I love you !”

She bowed her head but did not reply.

He continued: “I believe I have loved you for a year,—ever since our meeting at camp. You remember. And I thought” (taking her hand) “we both loved each other, ever since that day and night on the hill over there when you clung to me and looked into my eyes with your soul.”

Another pause.

The voice went on: “*Do you love me, Jennie ?*”

“Yes, William, I do.”

After her reply there was an embarrassing silence. She felt that he had released her hand and dropped his gaze from her face. They began plucking moss in a preoccupied way, she arranging the bits into pretty shapes in her hand, he throwing them aside as he gathered them.

The day was nearly spent. The west was glowing with purple and gold flecked with silver clouds. The children’s laughter came musically up the hollows, and their variedly-hued dresses fluttered butterfly-like here and there through the

woods. From the distant road came the mellowed tones of cow-bells as the cows were driven home.

“Jennie,” at length abruptly spoke the voice at her side, “I am going away soon,—away to New York. I may not return for many years, perhaps never, God knows! But I shall always love you, Jennie. And if I asked you now to promise me here in these old woods to remain true to me when I am away, would you do it? Will you promise to wait my return—and be my wife?”

Her eyelids had lifted in surprise. Wonder and pain struggled in the dewy depths of her eyes. Tears were surely gathering there.

“Going away, William!” she exclaimed, looking up into his face earnestly. “Going away! Why, you never spoke of this before!”

She expected an explanation and paused, but, as none was offered, she continued,—

“If you are only trying my love, William, be satisfied, for it will hold fast and true through every trial to the end; or are—are you really in earnest?”

His face expressed determination: “As much in earnest as I ever was in all my life.”

“And so you will go?”

She stood close to him, both having risen now; tenderly she looked at him; tenderly she felt

her hair smoothed by his caressing hand as he spoke,—

“Yes, dear one, I must go. I have long felt that there is no opportunity for me in the village, and the sooner I go the better. I could not leave without telling you, but I kept it back till the last to escape the pain. I start in a couple of days. I wish to carry with me your love and encouragement. There, don’t cry! You will give me both, won’t you?”

But her answer came not in words. Her head was bowed down, and sobs choked the words she would have spoken. She extended her hand, felt the warm grasp that closed upon it, and let it remain there.

“This, then, is mine?” he asked, caressing her hand and trying to meet her eyes. “Mine to have and keep?”

She looked up at him solemnly: “Yours to have and keep forever!”

And the tears she brushed away, the sobs controlled, as she raised her eyes to his,—tender tear-stained eyes, but brave, passionate eyes, full of the fire of womanly truth, full of the glory of womanly devotion.

And so was the promise given to love each other always, and to be true and constant, whatever might befall, wherever he and she might be, for evermore.

They left not the woods till twilight enveloped them in its steel-colored folds and the voice of nature was silent as the stars ; then arm in arm they journeyed homeward, filled with the strength of youth and the hopeful thoughts that never grow old.

But while this scene was in progress in the woods there was another scene, not so pleasant, in preparation in the village. The setting of this scene was the store of Gorham & Son. Those two worthies in a little private caucus held in the course of the day had developed a plan by which to administer a wholesome lesson to a certain youth who had so far forgotten himself as to abandon business for pleasure, for the time being, without the formality of permission from his employers ; indeed, without even asking permission. Such conduct was so reprehensible and ungrateful, especially in one who was so deeply indebted for favors at their hands, that it deserved rebuke, and they meant to correct it.

“We’re out of patience, we think, with mild measures in the management of this youngster,” remarked Mr. Gorham, Sr., to Mr. Gorham, Jr., as they sat together in the little back-office behind the store, “and it really looks ez ef more stringent means were required to—to—to curb him. Why, bless my soul ! he does just ez he pleases. What do you think now I saw him doin’ yesterday,—saw him doin’ with my own eyes, eh ?”

Mr. Gorham, Jr., languidly pulling the hairs out of one of his whiskers,—which habit persistently followed for a long time past had left that particular whisker very sparse of hair whilst its fellow was quite luxuriant,—Mr. Gorham, Jr., with marked deference of manner, couldn't imagine. It would doubtless have proven difficult to guess.

“Why, ez we’re alive and talkin’ together this blessed minnit, I actually saw him a-readin’ ‘Eugéne Aram.’”

Mr. Gorham, Sr., here raised his head at an angle of forty-five degrees, and looked at Mr. Gorham, Jr., through the wonderful spectacles perched on the very end of his nose.

“To think,” pursued Mr. Gorham, Sr., “thet he should hev set there in the store ez easy like ez ef he owned the whole business readin’ a novel, and a customer liken’ at enny moment to drop in!”

The contemplation of this dreadful contingency gave Mr. Gorham, Sr., such a turn that his spectacles wellnigh dropped from the end of his nose. However, as that had never happened, perhaps it never would or could.

“What shall we do to curb him?” practically inquired Mr. Gorham, Jr.

“We hardly know,—do we, eh?” remarked Mr. Gorham, Sr., inquiringly.

“Why, as to that,” continued Mr. Gorham, Jr., “we need only to provide for every emergency as it arises. Now, suppose we rein him in hard, jerk him up short, as it were, and give him a course of hard labor.”

“Good!” agreed Mr. Gorham, Sr.

“A good, substantial discipline and curriculum of labor,” pursued Mr. Gorham, Jr., gravely and learnedly.

“Just so,” assented Mr. Gorham, Sr., without clearly knowing what it was that constituted a curriculum, whether a figure of speech or a wild animal. But as the word was used by Mr. Gorham, Jr., it was unquestionably correct, and meant the right thing whatever it was, and therefore he meant not to bother about it.

“Now, egg-washing,” continued Mr. Gorham, Jr., reflectively, “is a steady occupation, and rather tiresome though it be done sitting; I would suggest that he be put at that to begin with. He might be kept at that employment all night. Having used the day for his own pleasures he ought, I think, give us his services to-night.”

Mr. Gorham, Sr., exhibited an extravagant delight at the suggestion. His red face shone with pleasure and his little eyes twinkled with joy. He rubbed his hands.

“An excellent idea! You’ve a head—a head, sir, you hev’. He shall wash eggs all night.

Ha ! ha ! ha ! *all night !* There's three barrels waitin' fur market, and he shall wash 'em to-night."

And the conference broke up.

The store had not closed, late as it was when Gorham & Son's clerk returned. Mr. Gorham, Sr., sat behind his desk reading a newspaper, his spectacles threatening to fall from his nose. His greeting was quite hilarious.

"Hello ! got back, eh ? Had a good time ? We're real glad to know thet ye enjoyed yerself. Fine day, too, fur re—creation an' pleasure ? We s'pose now ye'r tired,—good bit tired, eh ?"

The clerk honestly confessed that he was tired, very tired. He would have confessed much more just then, even to Mr. Gorham, Sr., hard a man as he was, if he had received the least encouragement,—confessed without encouragement, indeed, save for what followed.

"Why, then, we're sorry," went on Mr. Gorham, Sr. "There is a little job of work we wanted done to-night, an' we hoped that you could do it."

"What is it ?" asked the clerk.

"Wash them eggs in the cellar."

Without a word the clerk descended to the cellar. It was only a labor which he had often performed, and there was only a day or two more at best to suffer through. The work was detested and detestable. It was a process by which, through the use of vinegar and a flannel cloth, eggs, good,

bad, and indifferent,—if such a thing as an indifferently good egg exists,—became as white as snow. It was a particularly favorite device of Gorham & Son, designed to deceive the city dealer and increase the profit on eggs, and was apparently successful in both objects. *Cui bono?*

Resignedly the clerk addressed himself to his work. Just then he would have done much more disagreeable work without complaint, though what more disagreeable task were possible to him he could not conceive, unless it was to love Mr. Gorham, Sr.

Yet it so happened that all his calm reserve was overthrown and his patient obedience turned to unreasoning rage by an unexpected circumstance.

He had been at work perhaps an hour, and was thinking of quitting and going to bed, when Mr. Gorham, Sr., and Mr. Gorham, Jr., came down the cellar-steps and quietly paused beside him.

“How goes it, eh?” considerately inquired Mr. Gorham, Sr.

“We have come to say,” interrupted Mr. Gorham, Jr., without waiting for a reply, “that the store is now closed, and we are about to retire. You will probably be kept at work till morning, for I perceive that there are still two barrels of eggs *to treat* to-night. If you *should* get through before daylight, please—please have the kindness to lock the cellar-door. Good-night.”

And Mr. Gorham, Jr., having delivered himself in this amiable manner, languidly turned and stopped at the cellar-steps, with one hand pulling out his whisker and one foot beating time on the lower step.

“Why, you don’t expect me to stop here all night?”

The clerk looked up in astonishment as he asked the question. He looked at Mr. Gorham, Jr., standing there complacently pulling at his whisker. He looked at Mr. Gorham, Sr., who was leisurely contemplating him through the spectacles on the very end of his nose. He looked at the barrels, hogsheads, kegs, and bags about him. He looked at the tub filled with eggs beside him,—at the flannel cloth in his hand. Then he looked again at Mr. Gorham, Sr., as that gentleman spoke.

“And why not?” queried Mr. Gorham, Sr.

There was something overpoweringly sarcastic in the tone, something inexpressibly cunning in the eye of Mr. Gorham, Sr., as he asked the question and then turned towards the stairs.

“Night is ez good a time ez enny other to work,” continued Mr. Gorham, Sr., standing on the steps and preparing to mount. “We know thet ye’ll work well—arter the pleasures of the day. Good-night!”

The clerk rose to his feet as if on springs. A groan of pious consternation came from Mr. Gor-

ham, Jr., an exclamation of horror from Mr. Gorham, Sr., causing his spectacles to lose their grip on the end of his nose and fall rattling to the earth, as the clerk forcibly thrust his foot into that tub of eggs with the emphatic exclamation,—

“No; I’m d—d if I will! You and your eggs may go to h—l! I’m going away!”

## CHAPTER IV.

“Over mountain, and plain, and stream,  
To some bright Atlantic bay,  
With our arms aflash in the morning beam,  
We hold our festal way ;  
With our arms aflash in the morning beam  
We hold our checkless way.”—HALPINE.

MORNING sat throned upon the mountains. A flood of glory quivered on the river, spread in mellow waves of gold over hills and fields, and crept, soft as the sigh of a child, into the shadowy woods. It was the smile of Nature breaking over the garden of God !

The shade still lay along the base of the mountain and stretched afar into the river, covering in its path the long track of iron rails over which the early morning passenger-train came shrieking. Like a flash it came, stopped a moment, passed, and was gone. Long after it had turned the point of the mountain five miles away blue puffs of smoke still lazily curled up the mountain-side, dissolved in the air, and disappeared.

The peaceful country scenes about Slopingdale were soon left behind as the train flew swiftly along its iron track across the country down to

the sea. Philadelphia was reached at noon, and the customary stoppage of "twenty minutes for refreshments" followed. Then slowly the train pursued its course, leisurely winding its way over the Jersey marshes, past numerous nurseries, through incipient villages,—slowly, as though all effort were hopeless and all hope effortless, at last crawled into Jersey City. The sun was sinking in the lower bay as the last car rumbled noisily into the long, straggling depot. Then a thousand passengers, tired and dusty, disembarked, swarmed like flies upon the platform, and walked briskly towards the near North River Ferry. In a moment the gates were opened, and the multitude poured through and passed down to the edge of the wharf.

It is a pleasant sight to see the noble Hudson with the shipping of a score of nations, with the gay-colored flags at mast-head resting on its broad bosom! The sun is shining on the heights of Hoboken, where Louis Napoleon once lived when only an adventurer on the earth. To the right the river widens into the broad bay and harbor of New York. Across the river, straight in front, lies the great metropolis far extended on the horizon, its long line of docks filled with a thousand vessels, and its countless church-spires sparkling in the evening sky. What a mighty city!

If the sights are confusing so are the noises.

There is a freshness, freedom, and breadth in all the surroundings. One needs to have sharp eyes and ears though to catch all the details of the scene and the action; also a dexterity of body to get out of the way of something or somebody. As the six-o'clock whistles sound the hour the workmen leave their labor and hurry home. The sailors are singing songs and furling sails; the steamers are whistling and ringing bells; the great ferry-boats are passing,—how they careen and roll, puff and blow, the pilots ringing the signal-bells incessantly! Another train rumbles into the depot; teams crowd down to the front of the pier, a medley lot of carriages, express-wagons, trucks, and baggage-carts; and with the departing sun sinking in the harbor comes the dull boom of a cannon-shot fired from the distant fort to mark the hour of sunset.

How all this movement of active life and energy contrasts with the lazy sloth and peace of other scenes in the mind of the slender youth leaning there against the railing and looking thoughtfully over the chain! The things he sees are all beautiful, the sounds he hears all musical. Everything seems to say to him, "This is the land of promise, the Beulah land fair to the sight as the prospects of youth." It is a grand moment, and his heart swells as he looks.

But why doesn't the ferry-boat come? Cer-

tainly this delay cannot be usual. The thorough-going, enterprising people of New York would hardly submit to it. Boats are numerous enough ; they are coming in and going out, passing and re-passing on either side, still none stop at this wharf where the multitude of people stand waiting. It is a wonderfully patient multitude under the circumstances,—everybody takes it coolly. There is no complaint made, no impatience seen in the crowd.

What a commotion in the waves ! what a tremendous swell immediately in front of the wharf ! The river must be very deep, quite different from the shallow Susquehanna. Can this be a floating wharf ? What means that movement underneath ? Surely, the wharf is shaking,—shaking with a rumbling tremble from stem to stern as though an earthquake were at work beneath ! And how is this ? Is not the city coming into plainer view ? Are not the streets and houses and people growing clearer, larger, better defined ? Are not the vessels in the docks nearer ?

“ Well, here I’ve been on a ferry-boat all the while, and never knew I had left the other side till I’m half-way across the river ! ”

Thus to himself mused William Smith, casting a swift glance upward and backward, and noticing the man at the wheel and the long trail of white froth in the wake of the vessel.

It was quite true. The boat moored to the floating pier, or wharf, had seemed to be a part of it, and he had crossed the connection without perceiving that he had boarded the boat, and so stood there at the bow of the boat thinking it the wharf. Standing there fully a quarter of an hour, he was unconsciously conveyed to the opposite shore while waiting the arrival of the boat on which he stood. Had it been night, or had he been preoccupied during the passage, he might have experienced the singular sensation of stepping from the Jersey pier into New York without crossing the river at all.

In reflecting upon his mistake his conduct made him ashamed. He smiled at his stupidity. "No wonder the people seemed patient! They know their business, and I will have to learn mine," he observed.

Soon enough the occasion came for self-congratulation on account of an act of sense. Having taken the precaution while still on the cars to send his trunk to a hotel selected long before, he was fortunately foot-free, and practically already lodged on landing in the city. He, therefore, rather composedly ran the gauntlet of a string of greasy, noisy, and vile hackmen, formed in line down the street and compelling passengers to endure their indignities, to the terror of those who had never met that animal before and the disgust of those who had.

“ ‘Ere’s yer St. Nicholas, right up !” “ This way for Metropolitan Ho—tel !” “ Yar fur de Fifth Avenoo !” “ Coach for Astor House !” “ Baggage for the Brevoort; step in !” “ Get out of the way ! Does the gentleman want a carriage,—a carriage to any part of the city ?” “ Now, then, look sharp there er I’ll run over yer !” “ The Occi—den—tal Ho—tel here !” “ ‘Ere’s yer St. Nicholas ! right up !” “ This coach for the Clarendon !” “ Carriage,—carriage, sir ?” “ Right yar fur de Fifth Av—ee—noo !”

“ This gentleman is goin’ to——” hesitated one of the human jackal tribe, seizing his man by the arm and trying to press him towards a carriage.

“ He arn’t agoin’ your way !” brokenly piped a shrill fellow-jackal, as he seized the man by the other arm. “ Right this way, sur; close carriage, sur; this way !”

Leaving the crowd right and left, elbowing a way through the babel of confused tongues, passing right on up the street, William had nearly reached safety when his attention was drawn to the gentleman and his persecutors, and he stopped. An idea struck him.

“ Carriage here !” he cried out.

At once the harpies released the man they had hold of, and he went on up the street.

“ Here’s yer carriage, sir; carriage this way, sur; come, sir, carriage ready, sir !”

And the two jackal gentlemen, reinforced by a couple of their fellows, surrounded William at once.

But he strode on. His hotel was on Cortlandt Street, and only a block away. He was not afraid.

“Yer called fur a carriage,” began one.

“An’ you’ll have to pay for it,” said the second.

“Come down now ; ride or pay,” added a third.

There was an awkward pause. They were crowding about him and hustling him from side to side. He must speak to them.

“Gentlemen, you must allow that I can’t ride in more than one carriage at a time. Now, which shall it be? Settle it among yourselves.”

“Mine, then.”

“No ; mine, of course ; didn’t I see the gentleman first?”

“But didn’t I *hear* him first? Answer that now.”

“He goes with me, sir, an’ not with ayther of ye.”

“No, blame me! but that he sha’n’t.”

“Fur I got *hold* uv ‘im first.”

“You didn’t.”

“I say, sir, I did.”

“You lie!”

“What?”

While the two began fighting two others stopped

to see the fight, and only one accompanied his man now along the pavement. He was game to the last.

“It’s my carriage that’ll take you, sir.”

The steps of the hotel were at hand, and his lawful prey began to ascend them. Should he lose his man after all?

“I’m afraid I cannot ride with you, for I stop here,” said the voice from the steps.

The hackman hesitated. He struggled with feelings incapable of expression. Suddenly he blurted out,—

“D—n you! go to the devil!”

But as he turned on his heel he heard the voice from the top of the steps.

“Good-night,” said the voice. “I thank you for the invitation, but from what I’ve seen of *you* to-night I have no desire to make the acquaintance of your *relatives*.”

Passing speedily from the bath to the dining-hall, and from the dining-hall after a light supper into the street, William soon found himself an interested observer of New York at night. Within a dozen rods Broadway ran, and in a few minutes he turned into that famous thoroughfare and was lost in the stream of people that flowed, surged, and poured along the wide pavement. Brilliantly lighted, crowded with people, the great street glowed with life and activity, its strong pulse

beating responsive chords to the throbbing of the city's mighty heart.

It was a new sensation of delight to observe all this, and to be carried along in the press of that crowd like a log among logs in the river. The contact with men, the light, the gayety, and the energy thrilled through and through the nerves of the spectator. The step became more buoyant, the eye brighter, the heart cheerier.

There was a band playing stirring airs from a balcony. Underneath it the words, written in lighted lamps, "Barnum's Museum," sparkled and shone. It was the work of a moment to cross the street along with the policeman who piloted a safe passage among the teams and omnibuses and to stop before the museum. Upon the bulletin-board a bill announced a dramatic performance of the great, unexampled, and truly extraordinary play of "The Gasher of the Gulch," by that world-renowned combination and star troupe of actors and actresses, the great, unexampled, and truly extraordinary . . . . . , who for the first time appear in New York through the strenuously persuasive influence of that public philanthropist, Mr. P. T. Barnum, and the guaranteed payment of one thousand dollars each every night, and expenses, etc.

The play-bill was attractive. The open doorway stood wide and inviting. The blazing cal-

cium-light shed a demoniacal glow up and down the street, making all the scene magical. The music rose patriotically in the air from the balcony. The bulletin-board pointed up-stairs with seductive grace. Confronted by all these persuasive influences, William Smith forgot his small store of money, or at least cared not for its smallness. Approaching the ticket-window, he handed in a half-dollar, received a ticket of admission to paradise, and proudly marched up-stairs to a feast of joy.

The play was a melodrama. It was something about an idiot youth, who, concealed behind painted rocks at the left wing, witnesses the perpetration of a crime, and, afterwards, when villainy is about to become successful in other ways through that crime, reveals the crime, prevents further villainy, secures the triumph of virtue and the punishment of the villain. It was, indeed, a very bathos of literary and dramatic work, unskilfully acted and rudely set, but strangely effective, at least upon one of the audience that night. How real it all seemed to him! His young, anxious face was set hard as the heroine struggled for release from the villain as he carried her off over the treacherous bridge and up the mountain. The tears came when the lover found a piece of her skirt hanging to a bush on the river-bank and knelt down and mourned her as dead. The

wildest emotions were aroused by the cataract of real water pouring down the rocks amid the picturesque forests and mountains. The suspense was painful in watching the poor idiot who held the secret but was unable to tell it. And tears and laughter blended at last when the curtain dropped upon the happy lovers,—the idiot no longer an idiot, and the precious villain in custody of the law.

Oh, there come no pleasures in after-years to equal the pleasures of youth !

That imperfect performance of a poor play, the first play hitherto witnessed, was a delight, a well-spring of fresh joy that deluged the heart with pleasure, even the memory of which in after-years gave back the hopes of boyhood.

The heroine standing there on the mountain in the fire of sunset had spoken her part :

“ As the echo sounds from peak to peak when the voice is sent through these wild heights, so a soul answers soul in echo-waves, though meeting but once and again never more.”

William thought of nothing save the play as he retraced his way to the hotel and retired to his chamber. He soon slept. But ever through his feverish dreams came and went the scenes of the play. He awoke at daylight, but dozed again. The noises of a morning in the city were already in the streets, the milkmen ringing bells, the huck-

sters crying their wares, the carts rattling over the stony streets, the newsboys singing "morning papers." "As the echo sounds from peak to peak," the newsboys seemed to sing, and then other voices seemed to say, "so soul answers soul in echo-waves, meeting once and again never more." A loud knocking at the door, the announcement of breakfast, and he awoke and rubbed his eyes.

## CHAPTER V.

“A warke it ys as easie to be doone,  
As tys to saye, Jacke! Robys on.”—*Old Play.*

THE day brought its duties. They were clear, strong, imperative. He had come to the city to stay, and now on the first day he must try to secure employment so that staying was possible. The way by which he was to make progress, the business he would follow, had never been fairly outlined in his mind. Employment of some kind would be found somewhere, sometime, somehow, was what he fondly dreamed and hoped. He was confident that he should be able to earn his living. He meant to work hard, and believed that ready hands and a willing heart would not lack for work anywhere in the world. That opinion was sound.

The morning work began by searching the advertisements in the newspapers. Some of them wanted clerks, some apprentices, some porters, some copyists, some salesmen; there was no lack of demand for labor according to the advertisements of the morning papers. Many of the advertisements he answered, some in person, some

by letter, and thus occupied the day passed. One stern fact impressed itself upon his mind, that the supply of labor was greater even than the demand. The day's experience proved that for every "want" there were fifty applicants to fill it. He was not successful that day. He was not discouraged; he would try again. And so other days passed with a similar experience until a week sped by, leaving him still unemployed. William at this period of his life was inexperienced, as fresh as the growing grass and as green. And then an adventure befell him, which, as his biographer, I feel bound to mention here.

The little fund of money with which he left Slopingdale was more than half spent when one morning he saw an advertisement which on its face promised success, and he resolved to call. It ran thus:

"Wanted, a young man of ability to represent an old established house in this city; salary \$10 a week. Apply to Flink & Co., No.—Chatham Street."

No.—Chatham Street proved to be an employment agency. An elderly gentleman, a good-looking man with white hair and benevolent face, stood behind the desk enclosed in a little private office made by running wire-work about a short counter. He came forward and greeted his customer cheerfully as he entered.

"You come to apply for situation. Yes, thought so! What kind of a place now would you prefer? Something—er—light an' genteel—er—or out-door, sir?"

William simply held the clipped advertisement before him, and he took it and read it.

"Now this place," pursued the elderly gentleman, blandly and rapidly, "has been much sought after. I may say greatly sought after this morning, and it is, I fear, engaged. It is a place my partner secured and—er—controls. Let me see what can be done. (Musingly.) You are not a native of the city? No. You are lately from the—er—country? Yes, I thought so. Ever been employed in a store? Ah, yes, just so. I always take an interest in boys from the country, a de—cided interest, an' if I can,—mind now, I don't say I will,—but if I *can* possibly arrange this for you, if I can so far prevail upon my—er—partner, why, I will—er—engage you for the place. No thanks; I will do it because I like you, I—"

William here succeeded in dexterously slipping into the volume of the elderly gentleman's swift discourse an inquiry as to the nature of the business and of the duties to be performed.

"Our terms are two dollars in advance," irrelevantly replied the elderly gentleman, as he at once returned to his desk and began writing.

William renewed his inquiry.

“Shall I take your name, sir?” inquired the elderly gentleman, with pen in hand, looking up sharply at his questioner and surveying him from head to foot.

William never could tell how it was, but he put his hand in his pocket and in a mechanical way took therefrom two dollars, which he mechanically handed to the elderly gentleman. The elderly gentleman mechanically put the money in his pocket. He then wrote a receipt stating that he had been paid in full for services rendered to William Smith, Esq. William received the receipt, looked at it, saw what was written, and—put it in his pocket. What the services were which had been rendered him he did not know, and did not, at the time, think of asking. There was such an air of business pervading the office, such a charm of sincerity and—*promptness* about the elderly gentleman, that without doubt it was all right. He felt that it would have been foolish and shown “greenness” to stand there for explanations. And then the elderly gentleman’s unconcealed preference for him was so undoubted and flattering, and his whole demeanor so exceedingly polite, that it would have been rude to find fault. Besides, there was no time to think about it or loiter for explanation or anything else. The elderly gentleman came briskly forward, and, looking at his

watch, bowed his customer out of the office,—bowed him out politely, quietly, firmly.

“Day after to-morrow, at ten o’clock A.M., you—er—may come again, not before; an’ then, sir, we will—er—see what we can do for you. Good-morning, *good-morning*,—er—GOOD-MORNING !”

It was a long time to wait from Tuesday till Thursday, the day appointed, and the time was shortened as much as possible by sight-seeing and indulgence in the pleasures of hope. Perhaps reflection brought doubts. Was it possible that the elderly gentleman was a fraud? Did he insert that advertisement merely to get as many two-dollar bills as possible from credulous dupes? He had read of swindlers in the city, was this man a swindler?

If any such thoughts came they were promptly dismissed. For the honor of human nature be it said, it was impossible to believe that so benevolent a man could be a rascal.

At the hour of ten o’clock on Thursday morning William presented himself at the office. There was a placard on the door:

“*Gone to Jersey City.*”

The door was locked.

Evidently enough the firm of Flink & Co. had been called away on important business. It was clear, too, that the co-partnership possessed limited resources, or it would scarcely have been necessary

to close up shop to answer a business call. Could the elderly gentleman have absented himself to avoid his customer that morning? That would be almost too small. And yet it looked very probable. However, it was useless to stand there gazing at that card, the barred shutters, and the locked door. Determined to call again in the morning, William walked back to the hotel.

On the following day he came, and boldly walked in through the open door. The elderly gentleman was there. He was writing as usual, and wore a pleasant expression—and a new hat. He did not come forward this time.

“Well?” he inquired, gruffly, looking sharply at his visitor.

“I came to ask about the situation you promised me. I was here yesterday——” began William, trying to steady himself under the scrutiny of those hard eyes.

“See that card?” interrupted the elderly gentleman, pointing to a card hanging on the wall. “You can read, of course, an’—er—of course must be aware that business men must have rules, and must—er—have those rules observed during business hours. You see, we answer no questions here on Friday,—‘No questions answered here on Friday’ reads the card, sir. Come some other day,—er—next Thursday; not before. Good-morn-

ing, *good-morning*, GOOD-MORNING,—GOOD-MORNING!"

And the legend on the wall, "No questions answered here on Friday," disappeared from the astonished gaze bent upon it as the elderly gentleman bowed his visitor out once more,—this time shutting the door in his face.

It was now perfectly clear that the elderly gentleman understood his business. He was an able man. He was well schooled in his profession. He was capable of devising ways and means.

As William sadly walked away, more in sorrow than anger, he was conscious that the elderly gentleman was an accomplished fellow.

He was sensible of the fact, also, that he had made a permanent investment. It was only two dollars, but it was permanent.

And he knew that he stood a better chance of finding a gold mine right there in Chatham Street than of getting the position of "a young man of ability to represent an old established house" through the agency of Flink & Co.

And yet the lesson was not without value. It was an experience cheaply purchased and common to strangers in the city; it might be made of benefit, it might even prove the best thing that could have happened. And it did.

Spurred on to immediate action by anger and the

urgent needs of an empty pocket, William resorted to personal appeal to secure employment. Deliberately he went at once to work. Commencing at the Battery on Broadway, he applied in person at every store and business-house on the street, going from block to block, first on one side of the street then the other on each block. To every merchant he offered his services in any capacity. Work was what he asked, hard work, any kind of work at any kind of compensation. Earnestly asking to be given a trial, patiently following his search for employment, strongly showing a willingness to labor, he continued his course up Broadway. It was a hard trial. It was a cruel experience. The sensitive spirit revolted. There were times when, rebuffed and repelled, pride and honor, even decency, seemed to urge abandonment of the dishonorable quest,—times when discouragement almost deadened the heart,—times when, in this pilgrimage for bread in *forma pauperis*, the very soul sickened.

But the effort was successful. On the third day he was engaged as a clerk in a Broadway store.

“There is nothing after all like grit,” he thought, as he went to his work the first morning.

In which opinion, I think, he was clearly right.

## CHAPTER VI.

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”—*First Book of Samuel*.

WITH his progress in the city as a clerk this history does not concern itself. It is not its purpose to follow him through that three years' experience, entertaining as it might be, each year of which brought him nearer the goal on which his eyes were ever fixed.

Let it be remembered, then, that three years have passed since we last saw him,—three years of change, of ups and downs, of joys and sorrows, as are all the years of life to man.

Let it be remembered, also, that—as we are now pretty well acquainted with the hero—at this point of time the action of this sketch will be more rapid, and, if possible, more vigorous.

We find our young man this evening seated at the tea-table in his boarding-house. He is not much changed from the slender youth of Slopingdale, only grown more manly in appearance, with the lines of firmness in his features more clearly marked. There is a letter in his hand. It is

from Jennie Carey. She reminds him of the time flown, tells him it is her nineteenth birthday, and encloses her photograph. It is a pretty picture,—the eyes are just the same as of old. Looking at it he believes her when she assures him of her constant love,—re-avowing it to be still as true as when she gave him her heart three years ago with trembling lips and moistened eyes in the grove of country sunset.

There had come changes, indeed, in the intervening time, but no change in the devotion of these true hearts. Through all the vicissitudes of the passing years these still beat faithful to their vows.

Sitting there waiting for tea, the events of the past three years were vividly recalled by the letter in his hands. The contrast between the present and the past was strong and cheering. Three years ago he was poor, dependent, helpless, and utterly without influence. He scarce could boast of one true friend. Now he was self-reliant, held a position of trust and responsibility, and drew a good salary. Then he had no prospects before him. Now he had money in bank, was master of himself and his future, had friends, and possessed the confidence of his employers. It was surely a contrast to please if not entirely to satisfy.

Like all worthily-achieved ends the accomplishment had been difficult and full of trials. How

very hard had been the way up thus far! What struggles had brought him hither! what mental labor and unwearied industry! From the modest clerkship in a retail store, with which his life in the city had begun, through the successive steps of a clerkship in a wholesale store, and thence to book-keeper of that establishment, each step onward and upward, until now he stood preparing for a further step up higher, it was indeed a long and weary way.

And the future still held further trials reserved. Would his paths be as thorny as those of the past? No matter; the reward would come if the laborer only held faithful to the last. The reward must come, he resolved, as he tightly grasped the letter and shut his lips in sternest resolution.

When he awoke from his temporary abstraction and looked up, he saw sitting opposite him at the tea-table a stranger. He would have been regarded a noticeable man in any company. He was a young man of dark complexion, curly-haired and black-bearded, and possessed eyes of singular clearness, beauty, and brilliancy. He was altogether a very handsome young gentleman.

A steady observation of the stranger was interrupted by the appearance of the servant. But it was renewed on hearing him speak.

“See here, miss, what’s this?” pointing to his cup.

“That, sir, is tea,” replied the girl.

“So. Ah, well, if that *is* tea please take it away and bring me coffee, but if a closer inspection shows it to be coffee—or rain-water,—then bring me—tea.”

The servant departed enraged.

The stranger smiled. “I don’t know your ways here,” he said, pleasantly, “but I don’t mean to drink slops if I can help it.”

Perhaps it was a rude speech, an insulting remark, but it was not meant so, as was evident from what followed. He went on,—

“Excuse me; have you boarded here long? I came only to-day, and shall remain if suited, and, living in the same house, we may as well be acquainted, eh?”

The frankness of the stranger, his engaging manner, and, above all, his commanding bearing won his hearer, and conversation began between them and was prolonged to the end of the meal. And thus they two first met.

The stranger’s name was Harry Ashleigh, and his business, teller in a bank. Thrown much in company together, acquaintance soon ripened between these young men,—soon merged into familiar companionship. Each seemed the supplement of the other. Two weeks elapsed and they were like brothers in their close association and friendship; three weeks and they roomed together. The

short history of each was soon told. Perhaps it derived additional charm in being detailed from evening to evening over the cigars. Certainly the similarity of their experience did much to strengthen friendship. Harry's life had also been one of sickness, poverty, repression, and neglect. This made them brothers. And when joined to that similar past was the mutual purpose of working up and out from those accidents of birth and fortune into a future of security and honor, it looked to their ambitious eyes as though fate had cast them upon the waves of life in one boat to help themselves in helping each other.

The friendship of men! How compact and solid is that expression! How strong and lasting the passion that it declares! Yes, my dear madam, there is a love of man for man, not less spiritual and absorbing, if less intense and passionate, than the love of man and woman, and far more constant and enduring. It fills the world with deeds of bravery and self-sacrifice. It shines like an aureola of glory about a Buddha, a Confucius, a Christ!

It was summer in the city. Our two young friends sat at their window in the evening looking out upon the restless city and down at the gay throng of people moving along the lighted street. They were conversing and smoking.

“I do not know whether you are right or not,”

said Harry, continuing the conversation ; "but to me it looks all wrong to see you giving up a paying situation and living off your hard-earned money to attend that deuced law-school ; I don't like it."

"Why?" inquired William, quietly. "Do you think I cannot succeed as a lawyer?"

"Oh, as to that I can't say ; you may. There isn't any certainty in it, you know, like money in hand. Then look at the work before you, the long years given to mere preparation, the long years waiting for practice, the long years of toil to accomplish success. Why, it is appalling! On the other hand, you have a certainty by keeping your money, by adding to it from steady earnings, and by investing it at interest. With money you can make yourself. You choose to throw it away. Is that wise? I think not. A bird in the hand, you know."

Harry lighted another cigar as he ended, and lay back in his easy-chair, abandoning himself to the charm of the evening. With an air of conscious mastery of his surroundings he listened to William.

"But, Harry, the money is not wasted or thrown away ; it is put to the best possible use. What better use for it than investing it in an education? I hunger for education as a starving man for food. I must have it, let it cost what it will.

The mind is enlarged, strengthened, liberated only through education. A man's intellect ought to be clear and pure, not like the sluggish pond, stagnant, slimy, reptilian. It ought to be like the mountain brook issuing out of perennial springs and flowing down past verdant shores, a source of continuing freshness and inspiration ; so also education is necessary to attain a station in life, to achieve success in the world,—nothing worthy is accomplished without it. I must have it."

With an air of conscious mastery of his surroundings Harry listened to the end, then replied,—

"Certainly ; your motive is right,—it is even grand. Still your error lies here, that you mistake the means of happiness. Believe me, discontent would follow you had you mastered all the learning of the world. Much knowledge never yet brought peace to an ambitious mind. The possession of knowledge makes man unhappy. He sees the littleness of all things, the shortness of life, the cheat of hope, the oblivion of death. All that he can learn is but as a grain of sand compared with the sands of the seashore. All he does learn only teaches him a newer pang of sadness. In itself, therefore, learning is far from being desirable. Do you imagine that it will raise you in the estimation of the world ? Not so. The world lets the scholar rot. Do you

think to secure honorable station through learning? What cares the world for so cheap a thing? Men rise not in the world by education, knowledge, learning, or wisdom, but by money. Money is the power that gives us all position and influence, and the lack of it that keeps us low and unknown! It matters little what one has in his head if he but have money in his pocket. Believe me, my dear fellow, the need of the hour, the meaning of life, is *money*; wherefore 'put money in thy purse' and rise, if you will, surely and quickly."

Harry's eyes sparkled with excitement as he closed, and he looked, as he sat there so self-contained and wise, the very embodiment of the genius of worldliness.

William mused a moment before replying. The sentiments just expressed shocked him.

"Harry, I call that a superficial and unworthy view of life. Plausible as it seems, it is untrue. It is dangerous advice to be given,—dangerous counsel to be followed."

"And why?" Harry asked.

"Because, simply, there is no honor in it. If a man's life has no higher aim than to accumulate dollars,—if that is the only pursuit rewarded by the applause of men, then let us cease talking about immortal souls while we live like the brutes that perish. I tell you there is a higher meaning

in life than that, and you know it! I cannot believe that the world is so bad that it will not recognize the good, the learned, the virtuous. All that the earth is, all that man is in this enlightened age, is owing to the fact that such men once lived, and now live in the world. If these men had never lived, if no philosopher, poet, philanthropist, artist, teacher, historian, preacher, orator, or writer had ever lived, but instead the earth had constantly spawned gold-grubbers and gold-grabbers, humanity would present but a sorry spectacle; I will not slander the race to which I belong by acknowledging its contempt for itself. The world is not degraded and base. It will esteem the worthy though they be poor. It will reward the toiler though he be the poorest of the poor. It will honor a *man!* And even though it were not so, still my course would be the same. My own sense of self-respect, whatever may be the opinion of the world, compels me to a worthier life, and I feel it to be true that that man lives the best life, and bequeaths to his children the richest legacy, who sheds honor about his name, although he may live and die without a dollar!"

It was William's eyes that sparkled now, and William's face that flushed with animation.

But Harry sat there as impassive as an Indian. Quite unaffected by the impassioned rhetoric of William, he coolly gazed into the street and com-

placently puffed away at his cigar. He addressed his remarks to the housetops when at length he spoke.

“ Well, I’m your friend, and I wish you success. I want to see you succeed. The *success* is what one wants, you know, not arguments about it. I shall be glad if you get on in your own way. Perhaps if any one could you can. It is a hard way, though ; a regular Jordan, I tell you. For my part, I mean to try the other way ; I think it entirely more satisfactory. I shall try the worldly way ; it is not so perilous as yours, and there will be many to keep me company during the lonesomeness of travel. Moreover, there is a reasonable certainty of my reaching the top of achievement, if at all, at an age when I am still young enough to enjoy the prospect from that elevated altitude, whilst you will reach your cold excelsior height only when you are old and gray, and find it too late to enjoy anything. Now I speak thus plainly because, you know, it is my habit. You may call me worldly, or worse, if you like. But you should remember that we live in the world. It becomes us to adapt ourselves to the world instead of trying to adapt the world to us. As long as I live I mean to act with the world in which I live ; when I die and become an angel—well, you see the argument. Now, there is no denying the force of the world’s opinion. According to that

opinion the meaning of life is happiness, and happiness is wealth. Put it in any way you please and that is about the result. Well, is it not wise in order to gain good repute to fall in with men in their opinion, and not fall out with them? Why should one swim against the current of the world's applause? When a bank-account numbering variously from five hundred to a million of dollars is more influential in securing its possessor respect and honor than a whole handful of cultured brains, why, what's the use of cultured brains?"

The servant entered with their lamp, newly trimmed and lighted, and the conversation ceased.

And so these young men laid their plans, resolutely setting themselves to the attainment of the same object, but by different paths.

As the light illuminated the room Harry pushed his hair back from his brow, and William noticed a scar on his temple near the ear and wondered how he got it. The wound was an ugly gash, and he shuddered, he knew not why, as he looked at it. In a moment Harry put his hand over it and carefully covered it up with his curls. Ah, Harry, a time will come when that scar will eat into your brain and make you regret the day you were born!

As time passed Harry made his way in the world through the portal of society. He attended balls, parties, and theatres, and danced attendance

on fashion. He made the acquaintance of the ladies of society, and numbered many friends among them. Especially did he cultivate the matronly and experienced, albeit elderly and ugly. He became a pet of the middle-aged women of standing, respectability, and wealth. With the devout Mussulman he believed woman to be the delight and joy of this life and the hope and comfort of the next.

The church also became a hallowed place. He carefully attended all its various services, exhibiting the fervor of his zeal no less in ministrations in the Sunday-school than in the week-day prayer-meeting. Thus he made rapid progress. His pastor observing him, complimented his zeal and recommended the young men to pattern after so praiseworthy an exemplar of Christian life. The young ladies of the congregation, in the plenitude of religious emotions, labored upon worsted smoking-caps to crown that pious brow withal, and knitted delicate slippers embroidered with impossible dogs' heads for those dear feet so swift in the ways of the Lord. Harry had the audacity of genius, and the world was his oyster. Evidently Harry was getting on in the world.

Meanwhile William faithfully continued to pursue the fascinating study of the law, working

“Through days of weary toil,  
And nights devoid of ease,”

to fit himself for the duties of a laborious and worrying profession. His entire time was given up to this purpose. His mind, under the discipline of the master-minds of the law, rapidly expanded. As the works of Coke, Blackstone, Chitty, Greenleaf, Kent, Washburn, and a lesser host of legal lights opened up before him their wondrous beauties and poured out their gems, his ardent nature exulted and sprang forward refreshed for further conquest. Gladness, such as he had never felt before, thrilled him as he watched the unfolding, day by day, of the principles that underlie all human rights, and are recognized and interwoven in all systems of civil government. But while the spirit was strong the flesh was weak, and it soon became known that William was ailing. His sunken eye and emaciated form showed that all this knowledge so laboriously gained and greedily enjoyed was not a strength, but rather a weakness, since it threatened to rob him of health and stretch him upon a sick-bed.

His condition was remarked and feelingly deplored by the servant-girls.

“Thet light-completed feller looks bad, don’t he? He is gitting so thin he soon won’t cast a shadder! And don’t his eyes shine though?”

“Sure, thin, some bitters wouldn’t hurt ‘im,” drawled the maid from Erin, with her hands on her hips. “The byes are mighty thick in luv

wid one anither, an' they look like specimens uv health an' sickness togither,—ah, but thin don't I loike that healthy one! Och hone, he is the purty bye, wid his schmile an' winsome ways! An' he says as it's hard study that is bustin' his friend, poor chap!"

Thus the girls gave an opinion privately under the stairs, and the distinction was accorded to William—was it not distinction he was laboring for?—of being the object of a chamber-maid's pity. Evidently William was not getting on in the world.

But those two years of legal studies were the pleasantest years of his life. They were years, to be sure, of mental toil, anxiety, sleeplessness, and sickness; but they were years, too, of progress,—years all luminous with the hopes of manhood.

When William Smith at the end of those two years presented himself before the court for examination and admission to the bar, his advent provoked curiosity. Indeed, he was himself a curiosity. He was not a handsome man, certainly. His legs were too long and his body was too thin for physical beauty. He appeared to have undergone a recent washing, and suffered undue attenuation in the wringing-out process. His youthful and cadaverous looks were exceedingly funny, and provoked unmistakable merriment.

The lawyers themselves were not proof against the general feeling of derision.

"*There's a lawyer!*" exclaimed one in mockery, and the spectators laughed.

"Looks ez ef he hed lost somethin'," volunteered a loafer on the rear bench.

"Probably he has; p'r'aps his uncle," suggested the next speaker.

A handsome young gentleman sauntered down the middle aisle. He smiled on the crowd as he expressed his opinion,—"He ought to go home and lay in a square meal; he seems to need one."

But when his examination came on jibes and jeers ceased, and murmurs of approval and praise followed as every question asked evoked a prompt and correct reply in terse English. When the examination ended all poor appearance was forgotten in the new respect for mind and learning. It is ever so. For a time a man may be judged by his looks and taken for what he appears to be, but as time passes and he becomes better known, he will be judged by what he does and esteemed for what he really is.

The judge had been kind enough to accompany the presentation of a license with a little speech of commendation, eulogistic of the applicant's exceptional proficiency in the science of law. It may have been only a customary form usually employed on such occasions, but it seemed so appro-

priate as to cause a movement of applause from the crowd. Remembering our frailty as human beings we may possibly forgive William for lifting his eyes to the benches and surveying the crowd with a proud smile.

It was a couple of months later, when, fairly embarked on the legal sea, William sat in his modest law-office in Broad Street, waiting for the clients that might drop in, thinking of that court-room experience. He had just come from court, where he had made an argument in a case involving the question of vested rights,—always a difficult subject in law. Lying there in his easy-chair, fatigued and worn out by his effort, that old scene came before him, and he saw again the sneer, heard again the jibes of that day, and the quick change in the crowd that followed. Something of the same kind had occurred in court to-day. Would it recur again and again in his practice? Should he always be obliged to work up hill against prejudice in this way? The thought that he must first combat a feeling against himself before receiving justice on the strength of his cause was galling to his sensitive nature. He did not know then what he learned later, that all young lawyers have gone through, and must go through, the same senseless experience. It is a sort of punishment the people on and off the Bench take pleasure in

inflicting upon a fellow-being for his presumption in being young and trying to make a living.

Not being aware of this truth at the time, William was naturally restless under his experience. He rose impatiently and began walking the floor, and as he did so he heard hurried steps on the stairs. The next moment the door was thrust open and Harry entered,—the handsome Harry, against whom no prejudice was felt by anybody, but whose progress through life was a conquest of the good will of everybody. He stepped in quickly and grasped his friend's hand.

“How do you do, Bill?” he demanded, baring his curly head and smiling his happy smile.

William looked at him seriously. “You are welcome, Hal. I wish though you came oftener. I get lonesome here,” he said, breaking into a smile.

“Of course you do; it's a miserable den,” looking about him; “a regular prison-cell, eh?”

“Not when you are in it; it's always cheerful then. You are my welcome guest always.”

“Of course I am, better even than a client, for I come to do you good, while a client only comes for you to do him good.”

“What good?”

“Why, I mean to take you out of your den into the open air of life, out of imprisonment

into liberty,—in short, out of the law-office into society.”

“Truly? And how do you know that I will obey you? How can you guess I will go?”

“As you love me you will. Seriously now, Bill, allow me to persuade you this once to go with me to-night. It is a reception, an exquisite entertainment; come, I cannot be denied this once, you know. So get ready by eight. *Au revoir!*”

“But, Hal, wait a moment,—don’t run away like that. Listen. You are aware I never attend such entertainments. I shall feel out of place and strange; I know I shall not like it. What a figure I shall cut in swallow-tails, patent-leathers, and with hair parted in the middle! Think of me trying to talk soft nonsense to society belles! Spare me, I beg.”

“Nothing of the sort, Bill. It is only a family party, a friendly informal gathering. You have not asked the name of the place, but the party is at the house of one of the most charming women in New York. You will be delighted to know her, especially since I myself—— But I’ll tell you that another time. You must know all about it, of course, but not now. Suffice it that she is beautiful and as good as she is lovely. You cannot escape. You must come, so be ready at eight.”

“ Well, Hal, I will go this once.”

“ Thanks! And you will go again if you go once. I shouldn’t wonder now if I made a society man out of you yet. *Au revoir* till eight. Ha! ha! ha!”

And Harry slammed the office-door and ran down the stairs laughing.

## CHAPTER VII.

“ I saw thee, and the passionate heart of man  
Enter’d the breast of the wild-dreaming boy ;  
And from that hour I grew—what to the last  
I shall be,—thine adorer ! ”—BULWER.

ONE rises by slow stages to distinction, but he plunges at a bound into folly.

It was a fine night. The streets were crowded and brilliantly lighted, and the sky was cloudless, its dome thickly gemmed with stars.

As the carriage bowled along the avenues of upper New York sounds of music could be heard issuing from many an illuminated aristocratic mansion, and fairy forms of womanhood could be seen flitting past many an elaborately-curtained window.

The destination was soon reached. When he stepped from the carriage William noticed that his feet pressed the richest Brussels, reaching across the pavement and up the steps of a stately and grand establishment. It was a house wide and high, one of the old style of substantial architecture, its many windows throwing a flood of light far into and up and down the street. Through the open door now and then could be caught

glimpses of a paradise inside like a vision of enchantment.

"Come, Bill," said Harry, running up the steps three at a jump, "let us hurry; we are late."

"We will leave early, Hal," rejoined William.

"Why?"

"To lose no sleep."

"Pshaw!"

They entered and were announced.

The hostess met them at the inner door. "It is only a quiet evening party," she explains, as William is presented. She looks at Harry as he passes into the room, then, turning, adds with a witching smile, "Mr. Ashleigh's friends are always welcome here."

A tall, aged gentleman of aristocratic presence approaches and is introduced as Mr. Worthington, the husband of the hostess and the owner of the establishment. He bows coldly. "You are welcome, gentlemen," he says, with freezing politeness, then walks away and remains at the farther end of the room among a group of men.

Other introductions follow,—two young ladies are presented, one a niece of Mrs. Worthington, a slender sylph-like blonde of eighteen, with the bluest of eyes, one a companion school-mate, a contented brunette of sixteen, with queenly poise of head and a dimple coming and going in her olive cheek with her smile.

William sees his figure in the mirror and is satisfied. He does not look much different from the average man. His height is good, his appearance gentlemanly, his manner easy. His face is too pale, but his large eyes are lustrous and eloquent. Will those eyes ever overcome that gentle expression,—that shyness as timid as a deer with horns in the velvet?

It is a study to watch Harry in that maze of good company. He knows everybody. He converses with everybody. He pleases everybody. As he walks down the room with the sylph-like blonde by his side expressions of admiration come from all sides. And truly they are a handsome couple!

What a rapt surprise of beauty is that elegant home! The carpets are Turkish, and the tread upon them is soft as the moss in summer woods. The sofas are velvet and as comfortable as the arms of a woman. From the high ceilings drop massive curtains of crimson and gold to fall in rich folds across the windows. The walls are literally covered with rare pictures wonderfully framed, imported from foreign lands. The air is heavy with the perfume of flowers.

The charm of luxury and refinement—that rare combination—is upon all objects; the cultured and beautiful of society are there,—men and women intermingled in social intercourse, amid a

low hum of conversation, the rustle of silks, and swirl of muslins,—and the gratified beholder enjoys it all fully.

Mrs. Worthington comes to his side after a while and converses with him. He looks at the charming woman walking near his side down those beautiful parlors. How composed, handsome, and fascinating she is ! She can scarcely be older than twenty-three, the age of perfect womanhood. Her exquisite drapery falls in long soft folds about a nobly-moulded figure. He marks the play of her jewelled hands, so white, small, and delicate. He marks the knot of rosebuds rising and falling upon her bosom. He marks the passion of dark blue eyes and the voluptuous fulness of a perfect chin and neck. He marks the pinkish glimmer of sea-shell rose tints through the laces covering neck and bust. He marks these and the nameless multitude of charms, and his blood glows with a strange warmth and passion.

Somehow it seems that he has known this peerless woman all his life ; nay, he has known her before this life, in another life ages ago.

She turns upon him her subtle magnetic eyes and tightens her clasp upon his sleeve, and so together they enter the conservatory.

“ You shall tell me all about yourself ; see, are not these pretty flowers ? ”

He takes from her fair hand the newly-plucked

blossoms she offers him, and, with the lost grace of a knight of chivalry, holds them to his lips. He is thrilling through every nerve under her glance.

“And will *you* listen to such a worthless tale?”

She smiles: “I shall like the story. You interest me greatly.”

There is no reply. William is in a dream. The hum of voices from the parlors emphasizes the deep hush about them where they stand. Silently they seat themselves in a recess and look back through the tropical vista of gorgeous bloom.

The dancers are forming in the parlors. Silently they watch the moving figures in the waltz, dreamingly listen to an air from Strauss.

Unconscious of observation a young man and woman saunter down the adjacent walk in the conservatory and seat themselves in a rustic-seat, out of sight, but within hearing. The soft rustle of the lady’s dress, the gentle murmur of the gentleman’s speech, rise to the ear across the flowers.

“I love you better than life, my darling!”

The music pauses, the flowers bend their slender necks to listen,—to listen for the lady’s answer.

“I am so happy!”

The hum of voices from the parlors seems to echo back the words,—

“So happy.”

The flowers lift their slender stalks and bob their heads, seeming to say,—

“So happy.”

In that expectant pause the voices are heard blending in swift question and reply.

“And when shall the day be?”

“Yourself may name it.”

“Next Sabbath, then.”

“So soon?”

“An age till then, my dearest!”

Again the soft rustle of the lady’s dress, the gentle murmur of the gentleman’s speech, are wafted on the perfumed air across the flowers. Then the music swells once more, falling like liquid notes of silver in the air, and they two pass together arm in arm into the parlors.

William looks straight up at his companion as if to meet her eyes, but her eyes are bent down and her cheek has a deeper color. Her attitude impresses him, and strange thoughts are in his mind, strange words upon his lips.

“How happy those lovers are!” she sighs.

“Yes; as happy as a pair of turtle-doves.”

“They will never forget this house.”

“Never!”

“They never can forget.”

“Nor I!”

“You?”

“Yes, I ; for, madam, you are the handsomest woman I ever saw !”

The exclamation was on his lips, he tried to repress it, but it would out. How true it was !

“Don’t be offended,” he pleads, as he notices the flush deepen on her cheek. “I could not help it. I could no more withhold my modest tribute to your beauty than be blind to this blaze of light or dead to the color and perfume of these flowers. Pardon me, but you are Mary, Scotland’s queen, come to life again.”

She does not stir. She only lifts her eyes to his and gives one rapt look of delirious fascination, gradually dropping her glance as her lips wreath into a sunny smile.

The lips open for one word : “Flatterer!”

“Do not think so ; I am not capable of it,” he answers, under her spell. “And if I were it would be impossible here. No man gilds refined gold, nor paints the lily.”

No, it was not flattery, and she knew it. He spoke as he felt, and she, wise woman of the world, knew that fact as well as she knew her own wondrous loveliness.

More seriously she continues : “Then, indeed, I must believe you. But, kind sir, this Mary of Scotland, was she not a wicked woman ? History speaks ill of her, does it not ?”

“Most unjustly.”

“If I remember aright, she had too many husbands. And did she not—murder Darnley?”

“No; 'tis most infamously false.”

“Does not history tell it?”

“It does.”

“And it is not true?”

“No; the tale is a base invention of her wicked enemies of whom she had many thousands,—poor lady! Ah, she was no murderer! She was ever kind, charitable, pious, and a saint on earth. Elizabeth murdered her.”

“She was wondrously beautiful, do you say?”

“She was.”

“And therefore men loved her?”

“They could not help it; it is the fate of beauty to be admired,—of a beautiful woman to be loved.”

“And so she became unfortunate?”

“If to be loved was to be unfortunate,—yes.”

“Then she was most unfortunate.”

“How? In being loved?”

She lifts her lashes again, and, with an earnest gaze into his eyes, replies,—

“In being loved—and not daring to return love for love!”

A pause.

She rises now, and stands before him the fairest woman in all the world. She laughs lightly noticing his perplexed look. She turns her pro-

file to him. Her tone as she speaks is tender and low.

“Come, let us return to the parlors. I must make you acquainted with some of the charming girls, else you will rue your visit.”

He laughs scornfully.

“Girls!”

“Yes. Why not?”

“Mrs. Worthington!”

“Well!”

“I wish to know none of them. Attend to your guests if you wish; perhaps I have taken too much of your time; leave me here alone.”

“Why then, what is the matter?”

“Nothing.”

She looks down into his upturned eyes with sidelong glance and holds out to him her small delicate hand with irresistible archness. “I think we ought not remain here longer in this retired spot,” she explains; “let us go to the company and—talk further.”

Then he rises, and they walk arm in arm, like the lovers just gone, down the narrow path, in the midst of the tropical wealth of gorgeous bloom, and so pass through the door at the end of the vista.

“I am thinking about those lovers,” murmurs the radiant Mrs. Worthington, smilingly, as she turns the bluish lustre of her eyes till they dwell

steadily upon his for a moment and then veil themselves beneath their lashes. "How happy lovers are! But you have not told me about yourself. You are Mr. Ashleigh's friend, of whom he has often spoken. Come, sit here beside me and begin."

It is an insolvable mystery of life how human beings antagonize and attract each other. Who does not know of that terrible instinct that impels those who never met before to hate or love each other? Who does not remember a personal experience, and of saying, on a first meeting with a stranger, "I dislike that person, and yet I know not why," or, "I am strongly drawn towards this person, and cannot refrain from confessing my love"?

Was it such an influence as this that held this man and woman and infatuated them with each other? Perhaps so. They had met for the first time. They were young, ardent, susceptible, romantic, brilliant, ingenuous. The very novelty of such an acquaintance between such people, a first revelation of culture and beauty and soul to him, and of an appreciative and keen intellect to her, conspired to draw them strangely near to each other.

Or was she only amusing herself? Mrs. Worthington was a spirited woman, an entertaining as well as fascinating woman. She pos-

sessed beauty, intellect, and humor. She could use a highly-cultivated mind to as good or bad purpose as a blooming face and perfect figure. She was not wont to deny herself any diversion that was pleasant. She never forgot her power. She might consistently make a fool of a man. But on this occasion she had no such object or purpose, however plain the result.

Perhaps they were both fools. They certainly enjoyed each other's society. It took but a short time to enter into a conversation full of charm, covering the wide field of literature, art, history, religion, and sentiment, on all of which topics they perfectly agreed. That their views on all things should be reciprocal seemed most natural. It was an affinity of soul, and they recognized it, like any other fact that makes life happier, with gladness.

Why dwell upon the subject? It happens every day. The only surprise is that we hear of it so seldom. To one who knows by experience—and what man or woman knows it not?—what it is to meet and hold communion with an impressionable responsive mind,—a mind that in quick appreciation and sympathy seems a reflex of our own and meets us half-way intuitively,—such an one need not be told of the thoughts that fill two such minds when first meeting,—need not be told of the joy that both experience in such an interview.

The evening fled rapidly, its moments melting

away like snow in the sun under the warmth of that congenial intercourse. It was far past midnight when Harry, with the dimple-cheeked brunette hanging on his arm, approached and announced that the carriage had been waiting an hour. William hastily rose, expressing astonishment at the lateness of the hour. Harry smiled and turned aside to whisper something to the dimple-cheeked brunette, and they both laughed as they walked away.

Mrs. Worthington gracefully rose to her feet, laughing her low, musical laugh, and once more their eyes met.

“By this I know that you have spent a pleasant evening,” she said, smiling into his eyes; “otherwise the time would not have flown so swiftly.”

William was dazzled by her beauty. “It is heaven here,” he replied, in a dazed way.

“Then you will come again. Good-night!” And, resting her hand for a moment in his clasp, she turned aside from him and bade farewell to her departing guests, now preparing to leave.

In a dazed way William walked down the steps and entered the carriage; in a dazed way heard the fusillade of talk which Harry shot at him as they were driven through the almost-deserted streets; in a dazed way tried to reason with himself, but unavailingly, as he contemplated the events of that eventful night.

And dazed still, and silent, he entered his home. But if he had been anxious to lose no sleep that night he must have been greatly disappointed. For all through the night his rest was disturbed by sudden wakings from dreams of fairy-land, wherein the chief figure was ever the radiant Mrs. Worthington smiling upon him, gradually turning the bluish lustre of her eyes till they dwelt steadily upon his for a moment, and then veiling themselves and dropping towards the roses on her breast.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows.”—*Shakspeare’s Julius Cæsar.*

“His life was gentle—this was a man.”—*Ibid.*

THIS narrative has advanced thus far as a chronicle of plain biography, but now an eventful period comes, in the contemplation of which all that went before is but a series of introductory scenes to the central act of a drama.

Harry had indeed foretold truly when he said his friend would delight in the social world after once tasting its pleasures. The change in him of late was wonderful. All his leisure was now devoted to society. Almost nightly he could be found at some social assembly, ball, or party. His office was often deserted, and his business neglected for days at a time. Even the time formerly devoted to study was now given up to fashion. In these assemblages it so happened that Mrs. Worthington and he often met. His calls upon her at home were also frequent and prolonged. He could not deny, and made no pretence of de-

nial, that he felt more at home there than elsewhere. It was a restful place, a quiet, homelike spot. He met so many pleasant people there, and made so many agreeable acquaintances and friends. He was always warmly welcomed by the fair hostess, always pleasantly entertained. She was ever glad to see him, and he felt drawn towards her by the strongest ties of friendship, and so, quite blindly, and reckless as the moth that beats out its life against the flame, he obeyed the ever-active impulse that drew his feet within those doors.

And did he never dream of the danger threatening his peace in hovering thus about that charming woman? He could hardly have been accused of knowing the danger. He never analyzed his feelings or examined himself to know whether there could be any wrong in his conduct. Nor did he care to do so. His feelings were pleasant ones. It was enough for him to simply know that this woman drew him powerfully by the gentlest influence he had ever known fully towards herself; enough to know that he felt himself a better man when in her sweet presence; enough to know that he became wholly dissatisfied and despondent when away from her. He had no impure motive. He tried always to treat the lady with the deference and respect due to a married woman. He never thought of conveying to her

the intelligence that he loved. Perhaps the occasions were numerous enough when such a confession might have been safely made, might even have been expected, but they passed by unimproved. The toils of this woman were about him, her finger controlled the very beatings of his heart, her look the very thoughts of his brain, and yet if he had been plainly asked the question whether he loved her he would have honestly answered no. And he would have believed that he spoke the truth. What folly flows from love! He imagined that he still loved Jennie Carey. He believed that he was still true to her, and could remain true while indulging in delirious friendships with other women. His love! It belonged to Jennie, would always remain Jennie's. It would never change. Meanwhile, in Jennie's absence he could safely enjoy the subtle fascination of this cultured lady's friendship, safely live in the sunshine of her smiles, safely remain heart-whole, safely continue true to the absent one!

It was about this time that a slight interruption of affairs occurred. Harry was stricken down with a fever. He lay for many days in a raving delirium. William was constantly in attendance upon him. He watched him day and night, and forgot all else in his ministrations for his friend.

In the long hours of watching at that sick-bed

there came no feeling of self or self-interests to disturb the mind of the watcher. He sat there carefully noting the progress of the disease, promptly administering the medicine left by the doctor, and thinking of how he might best nurse his friend back to health again. The fever passed and Harry recovered, as much perhaps by reason of the careful nursing of his friend as any treatment of the doctor.

But long afterwards the scene of that sick-bed, and of all that had passed there during that weary watch, remained photographed upon the watcher's mind, and he kept recurring to that page of memory with a strange persistency of affection.

Of all those days of weakness and delirium one day stands out most prominently before his mind ; it is the day on which the fever broke.

It is morning, and he is standing by the bedside where Harry lies tossing his arms and murmuring vows of devotion to some unnamed woman. In a rhapsody of words he pours out his love to the unknown. It is the critical period of his disease and a change may soon be looked for, be it for the worse or better. Gently William bathes that hot brow and moistens those parched lips telling their tale of love. He bends over his friend with the tenderness of a woman. He sees the throbbing temples, and the scar, red now as blood, on the left temple fully exposed in the bright morning sun-

shine. He passes his hand again over the spot with a gentle touch,—and the eyes of the sufferer open wide, wild, glaring upon him. “I love her as my life!” mutter the fevered lips. And then the trembling hands are raised to remove that hand from the brow, and the curls are carefully drawn down over the scar, while the eyes sweep the room anxiously, and the lips say, “There is no one here but you,—no one has seen? I have been very ill. Oh, how weak I am! how weak, how weak!”

One week later the invalid was restored to health, and William went back to business, and to thinking about Mrs. Worthington. The absorbing influence of that woman was still felt and acknowledged; it now became intensified a hundredfold by a circumstance which wrought an entire change in their relationship.

One day Harry came into William’s office, all glossy curls and radiant smiles as of old, and threw himself upon the lounge with the announcement,—

“Mrs. Worthington wants a divorce!”

“What!” exclaimed William.

“It’s true. Old Worthington and she do not live happily. He neglects her, I believe, and ill-treats and is cruel to her. There is no congeniality between them. How can there be? ’Twere impossible in such a union,—a union of May and

December in every sense. And she is determined to get a divorce."

William was silent. Again there came strange thoughts into his mind. He sat there for a minute looking at the handsome Harry, then he replied,—

"If he treats her cruelly she ought to be divorced, but the law of New York will not divorce for such a cause."

"I know it; but the proper legal cause also exists, and can be proven."

"Ah, that will do!"

"Will you take the case?"

William started: "I!"

"Yes; why not?"

Certainly there was no good reason why, and he confessed it. It was his business. He was a lawyer. He was even glad to be of service to the lady. Why should he not take the case if she desired it?

"I will," he answered.

"Then it is settled; she will call on you to-morrow."

"Very well."

"*Au revoir.*" And Harry left.

The next day Mrs. Worthington called. She seemed to feel embarrassed and remained but a couple minutes. But more embarrassed still was her lawyer. His little, dingy, plainly-furnished office, with its scant supply of books, shrunk into

so mean a thing in his eyes when she entered that he lost all his professional composure. The stock had never been large and there was not a great deal to lose, but he lost all there was. In extreme agitation he took her hand at the door.

“Madam, I welcome you to my poor *sanctum* ; I can offer only poor reception. Let me render you rich services.”

She smiled sadly : “Thanks, my friend. Services will be rich indeed that free me from my husband ; for we are sadly mismated and miserable.”

She refused the chair offered her, and went on : “I employ you as my counsel to represent me fully and to manage the case as you think best. I have confidence in you and can trust you, for you are my friend, I think——”

“Madam——” he began, reproachfully.

“I know you are,” she continued. “In this packet of papers” (laying it on his desk) “you will find a complete statement from which you can prepare my case ; the other papers will furnish the proof. Mr. Ashleigh has seen you ?”

“He has.”

“And told you ?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know my wishes ; do them quickly, my friend, and then claim your reward.”

She raised her eyes and looked at him earn-

estly, then turned to the door. At the door William took her hand.

“Farewell. Your friendship shall be my reward!” he said.

She had entered the hall, but she stopped, turned, and came back to him where he stood. “Shall I—must I—call here again?”

Oh, lame and impotent conclusion!

As they two stood there in the lonely, silent office her dress touched him, her eyes looked into his, her breath was on his cheek, her little hand trembling on his sleeve,—but he did not seize her in his arms, he did not embrace her, he did not place her head on his breast and look down into those lovely upturned eyes while covering her red-ripe lips with burning kisses, though, God knows, all this he longed to do, was tempted to do, fought hard against doing, and might have done in welcome!

Instead of this he only bowed: “Come whenever you wish,—to sign the papers. They will be ready in a week.”

Again she passed out. She reached the stairs, and turned again, looking back to him standing in the doorway.

“Do you still think me Mary, Scotland’s queen?” she asked.

He trembled as he stood looking at her. One word and she would return to him; one sign and she would be by his side; one look and he would

hold her sighing in his arms. But he spoke not the word, made not the sign, gave not the look. He only said,—

“Madam, more than ever before. Farewell.”

A moment later she descended the stairs, entered her carriage, and drove away; and as the sounds from the street crept up in muffled monotone upon the ear, it seemed to the solitary occupant of the office a sad and lonely day.

The following day William saw Mr. Worthington. He stated his business frankly and in short terms, and asked that the divorce might not be resisted and the case tried, but that the separation might be effected without publicity or scandal. This could be done by formal proof by the complainant before a master in chancery at a private office, if the defendant made no contest. Mr. Worthington listened with respectful attention to the end, though he was throughout the interview very formal, politely sarcastic, and frigidly cold. When his visitor had ended, he pointed his long bony forefinger at the window in the office-door, through which could be seen the busy establishment over which he presided.

“Look there!” he said. “Observe my money-making machine! Observe its magnitude, strength, and efficiency! Is it not admirable?”

It was freely confessed that the establishment was all that he claimed for it.

“It is mine,” he added, with a chuckle; “all mine! What man can say as much of a woman?”

That was a way of putting a point in an argument, doubtless, but his visitor, not being there to argue the case, remained silent.

The old man proceeded, with feeling: “If I was not satisfied in my advanced years with this wealth-producing monster, to build up which I gave my youth and manhood, but wished to cheer my heart with other pleasures, to please myself with a young wife and a fine home, to hope even that I myself might be loved by a woman, why, I was mistaken and a fool for my pains. I might have known the outcome without trying the experiment. Now, young sir, do not imagine that I regret anything, except that I was a fool. I regret that, certainly. That my wife wants a divorce gives me no regret whatever. I have known all about this for some time, and if I ever had any regret it is past. So long as I am rich I shall not lack for friends. In this fine world anything can be bought if one has but the money,—merchandise is made of everything, from the virtue of a woman to the conscience of a lawyer,—no offense meant, I assure you. Money, sir, is the only true friend to man. It is enduring as the hills; the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Why should I try to hinder my wife in her little scheme? She publicly shows her dislike for me, and publicly

declares she will not live with me. What her motive may be I do not know, and do not care. It is sufficient that she shows dislike for me. I do not wish to be married to a woman who does not wish to live with me. Young gentleman, I shall make no objection ; divorce us at once ; the sooner the better. Good-afternoon."

Thus the cool and sagacious Mr. Worthington promptly disposed of his visitor and his wife in five minutes' time. He and his visitor never met again.

Perhaps it was fit that afterwards Harry, as one of her oldest friends, should have acted as adviser to Mrs. Worthington in the settlement of all money and property rights involved in the divorce, and that these matters should have been adjusted finally by mutual consent of the parties through Harry as the medium of communication between them.

But throughout these legal proceedings the interviews between counsel and client were, I fear, needlessly numerous, frequent, and protracted. That little office in Broad Street, with the name "William Smith, Lawyer," on the door, received the fair presence of the radiant Mrs. Worthington almost daily. They knew now that whatever of friendship had existed between them heretofore that friendship was far deeper now. They knew that with every step in the case that should alter

their relation towards each other that friendship deepened more and more. She was quite willing that this should be so. He was enraptured that it was so. He could not wish it to be otherwise. This woman's presence came like a sunbeam into his lonely office to cheer and comfort him in his solitary study and work. The recital of her wrongs stirred his deepest indignation, the narration of her sufferings reached the tenderest chords of his being, and her supreme beauty as she told the story of her life captivated his soul.

But it was all over at last, the case was ended, and a decree was granted dissolving the marriage and setting aside to the lady large securities of sure income, together with the beautiful home in which she lived as her own ; and Harry, with the legal document in his hand, flew like another Ganymede to this Minerva bearing the happy news.

One week later William sat in his office among his books reflecting over the past. He spoke aloud.

“There is nothing further to call us together, for with the ending of her case my duty ends also. Heaven bless her ! At last she is free and her delightful home is hers alone. May her life in its sunny rooms be long and happy !”

Then he thought of himself. How rich to him had been her rare friendship, the hospitality of her home, the influence of her patronage in secur-

ing him business,—truly she had been his guardian angel !

As he thought thus the image of the lady rose before him in the full glory of her resplendent beauty. The touch of her hand, the glance from her eyes, the witchery of her manner were upon him. The rich music of her voice, the faint perfume of her dress, still lingered in the room,—why, let there be no more disguise, he loved this woman.

Ay, with the strength, earnestness, and passion of a man who never loved before, and now loves utterly, he loved her ! He stopped not to reason, he thought not of consequences, he only felt that if ever man loved he loved, if ever man madly loved he madly loved this woman !

Scarcely a week had passed since they last met. Yet there had been no hour of that time in which he did not long to see her, as though they had been separated for years.

And now, what did he mean to do with that love ? Could he easily lay it aside like a worn glove and contentedly return to the paths of learning with the old-time ardor ? Could he pluck it out of his heart like an arrow from a wound and look forward to the future with the old hope ? Could he forget it and be true to the past and its promises, true to himself and the little woman waiting to be his wife in Slopingdale ?

The agonizing inquiry was right before him, not to be put by ; it was there clamoring for present answer, and demanding immediate decision.

Perturbed, feverish, all his faculties in a tumult, he turned to a little drawer in his desk and took therefrom a carefully-kept package of letters. They were all in one handwriting, a woman's, and were dated from week to week through several years, and bore the post-mark of Slopingley. He read them through from the first to the last. What hope, confidence, truth, and trust was in them all ! How clearly shone out from those pages the long-suffering, constantly-abiding love of woman ! Again and again he read the last letter ; here it is :

“SLOPINGDALE, —, 18—.

“DEAR WILLIAM,—I was so glad to get your letter ! I think sometimes you cannot know how unhappy I feel when you delay writing to me, or you would write more frequently. There may be little to say, there may be nothing, yet say that you love me and I will welcome your letters every day. It is now six years since I looked into your face, and, oh, how long a time it seems ! Oh, the sorrow and pain of waiting through these long and weary years ! Darling, you know how truly, how faithfully, my promise has been kept ! My heart has never known another love but yours. It

will never know any other. Now here my promise I again renew: 'I will be true.' God knows I shall keep that promise to the end of life. Write often. From your affectionate love,

"JENNIE."

He put the letter aside on the desk and sighed, for there came just then before his mind in all its original charm that old scene of years ago in the country woods back of Slopingdale. Again, in vivid distinctness, it opens out before his gaze, and he sees the sky unclouded through the moving branches of complaining trees, the crimson glory of sunset on the hills, and hears the lowing cattle, the shouts of happy children, and the lovers' interview of plighted troth to be broken nevermore. His eyes grow dim with threatened tears whilst he looks upon that almost forgotten page of memory which was once so treasured and thinks of Jennie Carey's faithful, trusting love, and his folded hands receive the tears at last as they fall in scalding drops as he confesses that he has not deserved such constant faith and devotion.

Oh, warring loves that rend the stoutest hearts, how dearly bought are thy agonizing victories! In such a conflict, the greatest battle that can come to man, Heaven help thee, poor victim, that thou mayest come forth conqueror in the strength of the right!

The day was closing gloomily, when the door opened, and Harry Ashleigh hastily strode in and stood before his friend.

His appearance was greatly changed. His face was flushed, his dress untidy, his manner reckless. With wild, bloodshot eyes he fiercely glared at his friend without speaking a word.

Perhaps William possessed the common weakness of man and was ashamed of tears, for he did not look up, but rose and walked to the window wiping his eyes, then turned and encountered that fixed and resolute gaze.

It caused him to recoil. At first he thought Harry a madman. It was only for a moment. On looking more closely into those gleaming eyes he knew it was not madness but anger, not insanity but rage that rankled there, rage directed towards himself. This he was sure of before the man spoke a word, and, therefore, was prepared for it when that word should come. It came quickly.

“So then at last we understand each other!” hissed Ashleigh, overcome with anger. “You—you, whom I took to be my friend, *are my rival!* You—you, whom I trusted, would use me as a stepping-stone to the love of the one woman on earth that I ever loved! Why have you done me this wrong? Why have you done it under a mask of hypocrisy, pretending all the while to hold such

high and noble views of life? Oh, you are a spectacle to gaze at,—a worthy, honest, *honorable* young man! A valiant gentleman to rob his friend of his lady-love! But you shall not escape me. This is a serious matter. It is not to be settled, I warn you, by a smooth speech from an oily tongue. It must be settled by the death,—ay, the death of one of us!"

William remained seated all through this fierce arraignment and waited thus its end. He grew paler and cooler every moment, and when Harry ceased speaking he found himself before the coolest, calmest man, with face of ashen white and marble sternness, out of which glittered two piercingly bright steel-blue eyes.

Harry was greeted with a sneering laugh: "Harry Ashleigh, you are excited—or drunk; suppose I call it unreasoning rage. In such condition you are unfit to either talk or fight. To-morrow——" Harry attempted to rush upon him, but restrained himself to listen.

"To-morrow,—what then?" he asked.

"To-morrow," continued William, "I will give you every satisfaction you want, though upon my word I know not what you are talking about."

Harry made a gesture of impatience: "Oh, play no longer the hypocrite. I speak of Lilian Worthington."

"*Lilian Worthington?*"

“Yes. You know her, do you not?”

“Great Heaven!”

Harry smiled scornfully: “Why, that is finely done. It is exceedingly well done for an *amateur*, I confess; but let us have no more acting in this business. There shall be real work from this time forward,—to-morrow give me satisfaction.”

“I will,” William replied, gravely; “but hear me now one minute. I do not pretend to be ignorant of the meaning of this visit,—it means a quarrel. Very well, you shall have it, but not on the ground of robbery. I have not robbed you. You are the first to tell me the tale that you and Lilian Worthington were lovers. When? I never knew it before. I can scarcely believe it now. What then? Simply that I could not have robbed you of her love. Rob,—rob you! Why, it is scarcely one week that she is free to know any love save a husband’s. How,—whence comes your right to speak of her love and its robbery? And still if you were her betrothed husband and she your plighted bride I am blameless, for she will bear me witness that I have ever treated her with deference and never spoke to her of love. Besides——”

“Stop there!” Harry cried. “I came here directly from her presence. I claimed the fulfilment of her promise and asked her to be my wife, and she refused. She would give me no reason

for the change, for she did love me once,—surely she did love me once. When I demanded why she now refused me she was silent. Then I told her that only one man was the cause of the change in her, and that man was yourself. ‘For Heaven’s sake quarrel not with him !’ she cried, taking my hand and pleading for you ; and by this I know that she loves you. Oh, God, how I have loved that woman !” And Harry threw himself upon a chair and bowed his head.

His friend, touched by his condition, approached and spoke kindly to him.

“ Hal, this is childish conduct by both of us. You little know how you wrong me !”

“ She loves you, I tell you, and you must fight.”

“ Listen,” went on his friend, still quietly and kindly. “ All misunderstanding can readily be removed without a quarrel. There is absolutely no call to fight. Besides, I ask you what good can possibly come by one of us killing the other ? Suppose that I am killed, will that help your suit with her ? Do you think she will love and marry you after you become a murderer ?” (Harry visibly shuddered here.) “ And if she loves me as you allege, will you be dearer to her for killing me ? On the other hand, suppose you are killed, what then is your gain or satisfaction, and what mine ?”

Harry started up, made one step forward, stopped, then contemptuously turned to the door.

“ You are a coward !” he hissed. “ You can argue, but you cannot fight !”

Upon the utterance of that word “ coward ” William took a grip on his desk as he felt the hot blood mounting to his temples. His nerves became like steel and his strength superhuman. But he controlled himself perfectly. Pointing to the door, he said,—

“ Ashleigh, you may go now. You are right, we must fight. Nothing less than a fight will do after that word. Fear not that I will fail you. You shall have ample justice and full satisfaction,—the weapons pistols, at this hour to-morrow at the usual place. You know it.”

“ The Park ?”

“ Yes.”

“ To-morrow at this hour I will be there.”

“ And I.”

And the door closed upon the departing Ashleigh. William looked at his watch, and saw it lacked a quarter of six o’clock. He remembered how well they both knew the place of meeting,—a spot in the Park retired and secure from observation, long a favorite lounging-place for these friends in the old friendly days, and he shuddered as he thought how different from those others this meeting would be, and sighed, saying, “ He would have it so,—and perhaps he was right. And *he*, too, loves this woman !”

The thought brought the wonderful revelation of that visit fully before him. Had she been playing with him? Was it possible that all their pleasant intercourse was but a web to entangle his heart in love for her while she cared nothing for him? Was she after all only a flirt, a coquette, amusing herself by destroying the peace and life of every man she met? He could not believe it.

It was true, then, that this fascinating woman really loved him. Ah, how dearly he loved her! She had refused Ashleigh for him! She was waiting to accept him whenever he should offer her his heart that had so long been hers!

And this woman had infatuated Harry as well as himself whilst she was still a married woman! This, then, was Harry's love, often spoken of and never named, the object of his adoration in all their conversations, and the subject of his fevered rhapsody on his sick-bed. It was this woman he had so long loved, and not the slender sylph-like blonde with the bluest of eyes, or the contented brunette with a dimple coming and going with her smile,—this woman, this charming woman, who had parted with husband first and lover next for what?—for his love!

Could it all be true?

And now, was his fair client to become his wife?

Should he at the last, after all the struggles

against this denied but overpowering love, overleap the claims of honor, break his plighted faith and his Jennie's heart, and marry this fascinating woman?

He bowed his head upon the desk and thought; but he was too much confused in mind, too grievously stirred in heart by the events and thoughts of the hour to resolve his course. He sat thinking till the clock struck six,—and then another surprise awaited him. He rose in the gathering twilight to go home, opened the office-door, heard the fall of light footsteps on the stairs and the rustle of trailing drapery in the hall, saw a form advance towards him in the doorway, stepped forward and confronted—Lilian Worthington.

“Lilian!”

“William!”

That exquisitely torturing meeting might well be passed by with mere mention, for no description can convey the fulness of its meaning or the sadness of its sorrow. Standing there face to face in the gloaming, it was clear to both that they had now reached that pivotal point in their lives from whence should flow the destiny of each from that night's conference. She looked pale, and perceptibly trembled as she hurriedly entered the room.

“There has been no quarrel between you and Ashleigh—yet?” she asked, swiftly advancing to

William, her hands crossed and pressed hard on her bosom, as if to stifle the inward tumult which in quickened heart-throbs rose and fell with her breath.

William dropped his eyes and shook his head.

“Then thank God!” she cried, sinking into a chair. “Oh, let me speak!” she pled, with clasped hands raised to him as he was about to approach. “Let me urge you by my prayers, by everything sacred, not to see Ashleigh, not to meet him for a couple days, not to listen to him if you meet him, not to quarrel or fight with him. I left him not an hour ago, and he threatens you; promise me!”

William smiled grimly,—it was clear she did not know they had met already, and she need not know. He would not tell her. He drew a chair to him and sat beside her.

“Be calm,” he said; “I shall not see him till to-morrow, and shall not think of quarrelling with him; but why does he threaten me?”

“I loved that man once,” she went on, rapidly. “I loved him well, deeply, utterly. This you must know now, though I hoped you would never learn it. I loved him, and yet when he came to me to-day and asked me to be his wife I refused him. Why? Can you guess?”

She had thrown her mantle from her shoulders and slipped her gloves from her jewelled hands as she spoke, and now sat close beside him, her wil-

lowy form clearly outlined in the twilight against the glowing sky as the fairest ideal of a lovely loving woman.

William did not reply ; he could not. There were emotions struggling for mastery within his breast which choked his speech.

“There was a woman once,” she continued, laying her white, warm hand in his, “who loved a man and was true to him. But she met another man who became her friend, and he came to be the only object of her thought by day and of her dreams by night. The love for the first man waned and passed away ; it was replaced by love for the friend. The image of the first man was effaced from her heart ; the image of the friend replaced it. Then at last she felt what love meant ; she had never loved before,—she loved her lover-friend alone supremely, devotedly, wondrously.”

She withdrew her hand slowly, gazing steadily at him as she did so ; but when he looked at her and remained silent, she dropped her long lashes over those dangerous eyes and impulsively rose and swiftly walked to the window, saying,—

“Do you ask me now why he threatens you ?”

She waited at the window a long time till his continued silence oppressed her. She waited at the window till his steady patience wearied her. She waited at the window expecting that he would call her to him, that he would come to her, that

he would understand, speak, and be rapturously answered. But she waited at the window in vain. He still sat there beside the vacant chair with bowed head, immovable, irresponsible, silent. Swiftly, like an enamored girl to her lover, she turned towards him and crept close to his side.

She smiled into his eyes: "You are that lover-friend and I am that woman!"

William uttered a cry and sank on his knee at her feet. "God bless you always!" he said.

Swiftly she continued: "No man knows the depths of a woman's love. Modesty would prevent this confession at another time; it is unwomanly and trying, but I have become the cause of a threatened quarrel in which life may be taken. Can I keep silent whilst that picture burns into my brain? You will forgive me, will you not? You will avoid Ashleigh? for he means to—to kill you. Oh, beware!"

"Forgive, forgive you!" exclaimed William. "Ah, it is I need forgiveness, your full forgiveness! Give it me now; this moment!"

"I do forgive you freely!" she replied, questioningly; then impulsively, "Rash woman that I am to bare my soul to your eyes! What remains to conceal?—you can take heart and soul!"

And with a swift gesture she bowed her head on his breast and clasped her arms about his shoulders, and lifted her mute lips and pleading

eyes full to his gaze. Thus for a long time they looked into each other's eyes.

There was utter silence save for the measured ticking of the office-clock, and darkness except for the reflected sheen of light from the street-lamps upon the windows. The new moon was just creeping into view out of the mass of sombre clouds.

They moved not. While he gently smoothed the wavy brown hair from that low white brow and looked into the heavenly depths of those great blue, melting eyes, she secretly entwined her fingers together and clasped him in her yielding arms of love. Then it was that she felt herself suddenly grasped and lifted from her chair and gathered close to his breast in strong arms as though she were a child and held there unresisting, while a shower of kisses rained fast upon her receptive lips. Then she felt herself released and gently placed in the office easy-chair, and he stood before her silently contemplating her in the moonlight. She looked up into his eyes expecting a declaration of love, but he turned from her and walked to the window.

“William!” she muttered. “My God, he is leaving me!” She clasped her hands and sat watching him.

What swift thoughts crowded his perturbed mind during that five minutes that he stood there

so silent and immovable no man but himself ever knew. He looked out upon the cloudy sky and down upon the deserted street and thought of the bright prospects ready to open before him. All that life could give or wish desire, love, home, wealth, friends, honor, and the respect of men, all that he had so long hoped for and labored so hard to gain, could be had through the sweet words of this waiting, loving, willing woman. His future lay all glorious in that agitated woman's jewelled hand; the hand hung drooping like a lily waiting to be lifted to his lips. With all the means of success in life thus at immediate command, with leisure, station, culture, wealth, and influence for his own, what could not his ambition accomplish? There need be no more watchful toil to secure a livelihood from day to day through long years of care and want; no more painful planning and self-denials to procure needed books and the sweet food of knowledge; no more weary battling with belittling cares or struggles with needs that shrink the soul and sap the strength of life; no more prejudice from men or denial of sympathy, help, and friendship; no more obscurity, and poverty, and unrewarded toil.

What a change comes over human life by altering its surroundings! Toil is joy when attended by conditions of comfort and independence; self-denial is happiness when exercised at will and not

by force ; a purpose of life is dignified when pursued for itself and not to earn a living ; prejudice disappears with the furrowed marks of care when they are wiped from the sweating cheek, and sympathy, affection, and love come so easily to independent homes and find truest expression where art shines, music swells, and flowers ever bloom !

And why not accept the proffered gift ? Why hesitate, why refuse it ? Would Ashleigh have acted thus ! His standard was what the world would approve. Would not the world approve this prosperous match ? Would it not commend and esteem him wise if he should reach forth his hand and secure all the advantages of life now so easily to be acquired ?

He was engaged to fight the man who was his rival. He had been his friend and was now his enemy. What claim had Ashleigh upon him except satisfaction at the muzzle of the pistol ?

Slopingdale,—Jennie Carey,—honored vows,—truth,—right,—these are mere phrases that may mean much or little, as a man may happen to be circumstanced, and just now all circumstances prove them to be little things compared with this golden opportunity.

Evidently his plain duty was to kill this man and marry this woman, that being manifestly the proper course in the opinion of the world.

Or, better still, he need not fight at all ; he can

simply avoid the fight and lock up his assailant for violation of law in proposing a fight, and marry the woman at once.

How easy it is to do wrong, how hard to do right !

When at last he turned from the window and approached her, he took her hand and raised her to his side, and they stood by the mantel, standing so still together that the moonlight covering them carved them into statues.

“Lilian,” he said, “you know without the telling how dear your words are to me,—words that fall like showers of joy upon my parched heart; but answer me: you loved Ashleigh, did you never promise him your hand?”

She looked straight into his eyes and replied, “I did; but it was long ago; before I knew you, before I loved——”

Harry was right, then; she had loved him and promised him. It was one more reason to fix his unalterable resolution.

“Then, Lilian, we are not free to walk side by side through life as man and wife,” he continued, calmly. “You have pledged your love to one who, relying upon it, has been true and constant in his love for you, be you therefore true and constant to him. He loves you as only a man with his ardent, impetuous nature can love a woman. When he comes to you again, as he will, send him

not away, but accept him. He will regain his old place in your heart and you will both be happy. As for myself, see this." And he placed the crumpled letter lying open on the desk in her hands.

She walked to the window, and by the half-light entering there she read, "I will be true," and caught with eager eyes the simple signature, "Jennie." She started, and the letter dropped from her grasp and fell in gyral courses to the floor.

"You see," he proceeded, coming to her side, "I am also bound by a promise. And by God's help I mean to keep that promise as faithfully as she has kept hers. Upon this resolve I am unalterably fixed,—nothing, not even your love, which to me is heaven, can move me. And when I tell you this, and you remember all the sweet time that we have known each other, and that our parting will take the sunshine out of the world and the glory out of life itself, you will know that I am not holding your love in light esteem nor thinking of myself, but only trying to obey the voice of duty and live as a true man."

Lilian's lips grew pale and her eyes flashed. "You love *her*, then?" she demanded, imperiously.

"Yes."

He sought to take her hand, and for a moment

the jewelled, nervous little hand trembled in his grasp, but she at once withdrew it, and anger, scorn, and mortified pride played over her features and shone from her eyes as she drew herself up proudly before him. A period of weakness followed, and tears and sobs and reproaches, much harder to endure than her scorn.

But in that brief moment he led her to her seat and pled with her on behalf of Ashleigh and for forgiveness for himself, and the glimmering moon-beams saw how the romance faded out of life in the separation of lovers. Even in such conversation the moments sped that witnessed their parting, and when she rose to go, his last words impressed themselves upon her memory so that she never forgot them.

“It is best to love but one,” he said, “and to be true to one forever; for true hearts are more than diadems, and honored vows than plaudits of the world!”

And so they parted, the honor of the man having been preserved in holding faith with his friend and keeping his promise to his first love,—parted thus thinking never to meet again,—parted as by death; and when the rattling sounds of carriage-wheels had gradually merged into a far-away echo a solitary man still stood alone in Broad Street with tearful eyes lifted to the stars.

## CHAPTER IX.

“ I shall grieve down this blow,—  
What does not man grieve down ?”

COLERIDGE.

THE next day at the appointed hour the two friends met to fight. The duello is no longer the approved mode of settling personal difficulties in civilized communities,—and yet much might be said in its favor, even in these days when the most urgent need of society seems to be a high sense of honor, personal bravery, and immediate accountability for acts and words and conduct.

During that long day each was often sorry for his anger and deplored the necessity of meeting as enemies to kill each other. But their outward demeanor showed little or nothing of the inner conflict of feelings, for never were men apparently more calm and self-possessed. Ashleigh, smarting under the sting of defeat in his suit of love, was fully determined to revenge himself, and he made his preparations for the fight as if it were a foregone conclusion that he would kill his man. He went about his business all the day as usual, and when evening came repaired to his home and dined, then to his rooms, where he loaded two

pistols and put them in his pockets, then he passed out of the house and turned the corner down the street. He had not met his friend. He wrote no line, left no word, and no one knew his deadly errand save himself, his antagonist, and God.

William passed the day locked in his office, buried in thought. He wrote letters and directions concerning his business, and put his house in order against the contingency that he might never return. He prayed a little, too,—it was a long time since he last prayed,—during the lonesomeness of the day, and felt better for it. When evening came, he arranged his papers on his desk, and passed out to supper; after which he entered a carriage, and was rapidly driven up Broadway, out Harlem Lane, and down the broad driveway of the Central Park.

That journey to the scene of the duel was doubtless a long one to both men, measuring time by thoughts and heart-beats and remembrance of a past life.

Life is never so sweet as when we are about to die! It is a relief to be suddenly freed from a great trouble and to know that a heavy weight is lifted from a weary life. It is a delight to be set at liberty after long imprisonment and to feel the cramp of bondage superseded by the light and beauty and freedom of the world. But to escape impending death, and to know that all danger is

passed, and not death but life stretches before, this is inexpressible bliss !

It had long been a habit of William to underrate the value of human life, unless it produced something worthy. He had been wont to draw comparisons between the lives of men, estimating them on a scale of value according to achievements wrought, and calling some good, others worthless, and still others worse than worthless, in which last class he had since yesterday placed his own life. But now he looked through changed eyes. He realized during the drive what he had not well considered before, that every man, whatever may be his station or his trouble, still clings wildly and desperately to life. He did not know till then how fully he felt himself to be a part of that moving throng of humanity that poured along the streets, himself filled in every pulse with the restless energy of being which laughed, wept, and hurried by all around him. And thinking these thoughts his mind seized hold of the world with a new impulse born of the later knowlege, and his heart yearned to continue its beating in the world and not be stilled in the sleep of death. There came before him the image of his aged mother as he remembered the past, and he saw her sitting there in her lonely country home, waiting and watching through troubled years for the coming of her boy, whose living face she might never look upon

again. Then he dashed a hand over his eyes, gulped down something that persisted in rising in his throat, and forced his thinking into other channels.

The marble palaces one by one swept to the rear along the route, the roomy mansions of aristocratic grandeur flitted past, the open grounds circled into view, their frosted tree-tops glistening in the evening sun, then the open park stretched wide and far away before, and the carriage whirled into it and down the driveway to the Ramble.

He alighted and noticed that Harry had not yet arrived. He looked at his watch and saw that it lacked five minutes of the appointed time. At a sign the driver remounted his box and drove away. The air was chilly, and all the summer-time beauty of the spot had disappeared. There had been a rain the night before, followed by freezing, and a thin crust of ice covered the earth and coated the branches and twigs of the trees. Off in the distance rested the city under a cloudy February sky, its spires just tipped with the lingering rays of the setting sun.

There was a little foot-path leading from the driveway into a cosey little retreat of rocks and trees, and running completely around the hill rising in the midst. The path was quite narrow and hid by the rocks and trees from observation,

and was about one hundred feet in length circling the hill.

Ashleigh soon made his appearance. He was accompanied by a gentleman with white hair, black eyes, and beard, wearing a military cloak and cap, who at once took charge of the combatants and made all suggestions, to which they each assented, except to one suggestion that they should shake hands and be friends, the only really sensible suggestion then and there made.

Harry had little of the appearance of a man bent on so serious a business as a duel, for he was dressed in full evening costume, and carried himself with as graceful and careless an air as he was wont to assume on entering a ball-room.

The men took their places. They stood back to back in the little path which ran around the hill, and were to walk away from each other, still following the circling path until they caught sight of each other on the opposite side, when each was to fire once,—a very simple and deadly arrangement.

The military gentleman, performing the impartial duties of second to both men, took his station on the brow of the hill holding a handkerchief in his hand, which being dropped should be the signal to proceed. When all was ready, and the men stood there back against back in the narrow path, in the right hand of each a loaded pistol

ready cocked and finger on the trigger waiting for the signal, the slight figure and pale face of William stood in marked contrast to the dark and manly Harry in his closely-buttoned black coat; and even the military gentleman, a nobly-moulded form of martial bearing, lacked somewhat in comparison with this impassioned theatrical-mannered Ashleigh, with his self-contained air and piercing eyes.

Did they not think, as they stood thus touching each other, of the past days of friendly companionship? and did not those thoughts touch their hearts and compel them to stay their murderous hands? Whatever of regret for their quarrel or sorrow for the past they may have felt, and doubtless such thoughts oppressed them, they were conscious of no way of settling that quarrel or quieting the wrong of the past save a present fight. Had not each injured the other? Then each must endeavor to kill the other,—such, still holds the wise world, is justice, the attribute of Deity!

Twilight had begun to envelop the earth in a mantle of gray when the stern inquiry came from the brow of the hill,—

“Are you ready?”

The sound aroused both men, and they looked up at the gentleman on the hill, and intently watched the hand holding the handkerchief.

Then came the signal. “One—two—three!”

he cried, and, at the last word, dropped the handkerchief.

With a quick, determined step Ashleigh sprang forward, and walked swiftly down the little path as it wound in a curve around the hill, his eye shining like an angry fire, his lips compressed in firm resolve, and his pistol extended before him in a wicked aim along the path.

Not so, however, his antagonist, who walked slowly but firmly along the path, keeping his arm immovably at his side and his eyes steadily fixed on the curve of the hill before him.

There was a death-like pause for a minute, then suddenly the report of a discharged pistol, and the men stood in sight of each other scarcely ten paces apart. From the smoke curling up the side of the hill it was observed that Ashleigh only had fired. He had now thrown his useless weapon on the ground, with a muttered curse, as he saw that he had missed his man, saw his foe unharmed, advancing upon him to within three paces, when he stopped, raised his pistol, and levelled it full at Ashleigh's breast.

“Fire!” in commanding tone, cried the military gentleman, hurrying down the hill-side.

Ashleigh closed his eyes and lifted his face to the sky, while his lips moved in the offering of a prayer. His face was pale and his lips trembled. “For God's sake,” he pled, “don't prolong sus-

pense, but fire,—fire now!” And he bent forward as if to receive the charge in his breast.

“ Well, then, Harry Ashleigh, I fire thus,—not at the heart of a friend I love, but into the unharmed air!” And, as he spoke, William discharged his weapon over his head, and threw it behind him among the trees.

Ashleigh started forward, his face radiant with joy. It was as though his life had been wrested from him and given back to him again, as though he had been rescued from the horrors of death and the tomb to live and enjoy the glory of the world once more. It was a delicious moment of happiness and interrupted speech, but it lasted only a moment, for he had hardly reached his antagonist’s side before William grew deathly pale, staggered, and fell. On the ground where he lay were drops of blood, his left hand was covered with it, his sleeve soaked with it as it flowed from the wound in his arm, for he had been struck after all, and his left arm was broken.

The old duellist bent over the wounded man, tearing open the sleeve to find the wound; he bathed and deftly bandaged the arm and placed it in a sling. “ It is only a slight scratch,” he said, “ and we must attend to it, and the gentleman will soon be healed.”

When the wounded man opened his eyes and saw Ashleigh bending over him with something

of the old-time tenderness in his face, he turned to him and reached out his hand, which Ashleigh grasped as he knelt down by his side. For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes without speaking. They looked at each other and tightened the hand-clasp and said nothing. Then darkness fell between and covered them with its sable mantle, and they spoke together without seeing each other.

“Bill, I meant to kill you. God forgive me!”

“Don’t say a word about it, Hal. I forgive you everything. We were both to blame, and it’s all over and past.”

“Over and past, Bill, for me. I accept the result, and resign the woman. You are deserving of her love.”

“Not so, Hal. Lilian shall yet be your wife. I know she loves you still.”

“How?”

“It is true.”

“Forgive me, Bill. But she did love me—once.”

“And does still.”

“How do you know this?”

The wounded man moved uneasily: “I saw her before this meeting, and took leave of her—forever.”

“You?”

“Yes; you believe me, do you not?”

“Bill, I *do* believe you.”

And the conversation dropped to whispers, for the wounded man was growing weak; but even in whispers a world of meaning passed between them before they parted. After a long while Harry again spoke aloud.

“And thus you give me life and love,—thus bestow on me, who would have killed you, a glorious future! This is, indeed, friendship, and I can never forgive myself for wishing to destroy you.”

“Hal!”

“Bill!”

“I have only tried to do right,—and you were angry. Only live worthily and you will be happy.”

“And you say *she* knows nothing of our quarrel?”

“Not a word.”

“And she loves me and will marry me?”

“Yes.”

It was dangerous ground, and the answer came low and weak and accompanied with a sigh from the suffering man, racked by physical and mental anguish, but it came like a benison to him listening there.

“I never meant to fire upon you, Hal,” went on the halting, feeble voice, after another interval of silence; “but you taunted me with hypocrisy

and cowardice, you remember, and it was that reproach that brought me here ; it was impossible to show you your mistake in any other way, and therefore we met."

" I was wrong, Bill ; I acknowledge it."

" And now, Hal, farewell !"

" Not farewell, for I shall go home with you !"

" No."

" Why not ?"

" We must part."

" Not while you have that wound."

" It will soon heal at the hospital. No, Hal ; having performed my duty we must part, and forever. I shall leave the city when I am strong again ; the world is wide, and I shall not want for a home. As for yourself, your future is assured ; it will be all that you wished and planned and hoped. See to it that you enoble it with your life. Be very kind to *her*. And when you think of me sometimes in the happy days to come, try to remember that I was your friend, try to think of me as a quiet, unknown man who once did you a favor."

Ashleigh's reply was interrupted by the approach of the polite and manly soldier, who came between them to lift the young man to his carriage, which had arrived, and a moment later he was seated in the carriage by his patient's side. If the young gentleman would honor him his house was

at his disposal until his wound healed, and, being himself a surgeon, perhaps his services could be of value to his guest, but in the mean time he would accompany the gentleman to the city and see him made comfortable ; thus spoke the military gentleman, and his kindness was at once acknowledged and his offer accepted by the wounded man, and so the two carriages left the park, Ashleigh riding alone.

But in the course of the drive homeward the manner of the military gentleman lost something of its formal politeness and became singularly tender and confidential, as he said, feelingly,—

“ It is an honorable thing to save a rival’s life; more honorable to love an enemy; but it is Christ-like to bestow one’s all upon another. And yet somehow I feel dissatisfied, and wish that there were something from the other side to balance the obligation. I think the other fellow should have carried the broken arm.”

## CHAPTER X.

“Comfort? comfort scorned of devils, this is a truth the poet sings,  
That a sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.”—TENNYSON.

“We meet again, where first we met  
In olden days when we were young;  
When fairest flowers about us bloomed,  
And sweetest birds above us sung.”

THE long and dreary winter had passed away and spring had come again. The ice and snow had disappeared from the shady, sheltered hill-sides. Everywhere in nature there awoke a fresher beauty and a newer life. The migratory birds returned from the south, flying through the balmy air on glad wings as the trees began to leaf from the bud, the grass to peep out here and there over the fields and from the roadside, and the earlier flowers to lift their happy faces to the sun in the gardens.

On the hill-side sloping to the river’s edge, nestling amid the encircling mountains, lay the village of Slopingdale, crowned once more with the glory of a perfect day; swiftly past its banks

rushed the swollen river, submerging the shore and crumbling the clay foundations of many a habitation as it bore on its broad, heaving bosom the myriad rafts of lumber, which by every spring freshet are carried down to the sea. Along the street following the bend of the river the merchants displayed their wares in attractive ways before their doors, while lads and lassies in pairs tripped over the uneven pavements and children laughed and romped on their way to school.

On the main street, looking out upon the rushing river, a little two-story cottage stood, a garden and lawn around it, and a portico in front covered with vines and flowers; and within, at the open window over the portico, a woman sat, alone and with folded hands, looking out upon the sunrise that crowned the mountain-tops and reddened the river like a sheet of flame.

Would we recognize in that slender, pale-faced woman, with those sad eyes and thin hands, Jennie Carey, the village belle of six years ago?

She was thinking, as she sat there in the glow of sunshine, what a beautiful world we live in, and how much there is all around us to make us happy if only we have the companionship of one we love. To live in solitude is not happiness, however fair the face of nature; there must be one whom we love and trust to share life with us to make it desirable and worth the living! She

laid her arms on the window-sill, and, with her hands crossed on her bosom, indulged herself with sorrowful reflections. Again it was spring-time, and so the years one by one went by, coming with beautiful promises of hope and joy for all save her, and fulfilling those promises to all save her alone. And how much longer still to wait? how many years yet to be patient? how much more of the hope deferred that maketh the heart sick? Why was her life so barren and wretched? Others were happy,—so happy that hardly a care vexed the smooth current of their peaceful days. She looked upon them daily, their steps were buoyant, their eyes sparkled, and their laugh rung out merrily as they passed her on the street, greeting her with sweet smiles and brave words that showed the inward peace of mind of contented lives. They had the companionship of the loved ones; they had heart and hope in their work and life. For her, however, the whole world was empty, and she were perhaps better dead. The idea of self-destruction possessed her once, and was overcome only by a strong struggle. Would there ever be an end to the long hunger of her heart crying out for love,—crying out and being denied from year to year? Her health had plainly suffered in the cruel discipline, her steps growing slower, her cheeks paler, and her eyes losing their old-time brilliancy. She had no heart in her work and life.

She lifted her head, smoothed back her dishevelled hair, and rose from her lowly seat at the window. She had no business to be sitting there dreaming. There was the room to sweep, the beds to make, the dishes to wash, the house to be set to rights, and the dinner to cook. Nor was she apparelled suitably for sentimental thoughts. Her dress was only a plain calico, somewhat soiled, without collar or cuffs, and lacking a few buttons in front. She had but to reach out her hand and there stood the waiting broom ready for duty. Altogether her present attitude of idleness was inexcusable. It was out of place. The time had come to quit dreaming and commence working. And yet notwithstanding her palpable neglect of duty, the little woman continued to stand there, her hands folded before her and her gaze out upon the rushing river.

That sunrise was just like the sunrise six years ago when *he* went away ; six years ago ! The grasp of his hand, the look from his eyes, the kiss when they parted on that bright morning could she ever forget ? When, with a smile on his lips and a brave good-by, he turned to go, and she entered the house to hide her pain and tears, how her heart yearned to look upon him once again ! and how the sunlight scorched her hot eyes as she threw open that window where she now stands and caught his last adieu, waving his handkerchief

to her from the boat on the river while the water dropped from the dipping oars like the sparkle of diamonds !

Did he still remember the time of their first meeting, that time so long ago before they loved ? Did he remember that summer night at camp-meeting, the tents in a circle under the tall trees, the rude benches for seats and pine platform for pulpit, the prayers and songs, and the torches blazing over the scene, and the stars looking down from an infinite distance through the tasselled boughs of the old trees ?

Had he forgotten the praise whispered to her that night in God's temple, and how she hung upon his words like a bee on a flower, and drank the homage of his glances as his eyes looked into hers, even as the wanderer, overcome with weariness, stopping by the mountain rock, drinks a refreshing draught from the crystal spring ? Had he forgotten that she was dressed in white that night, and that he had called her an angel and wished the morning might never come, for fear that she would disappear with the paling stars ? Had he forgotten the happy period between that meeting and their parting, the period of blissful companionship merging gradually into the holiness of love ?

God help her if she has loved that man in vain ! She was his altogether, and could not love him

less. He was the hope of her life. He had come into the girlhood of her life in its early morning, and hung over its day his own sunny manhood,—without him all was night!

And now while she loves and waits, performing the dull duties of a weary existence without the warmth of hope, he, the loved one, is away in the great city, among its busy scenes and its great people, working for name and fame without a thought of one who would willingly die for him. He writes of his advancement and success, his work and triumphs; of the pleasures of the city, of balls and parties, theatres and social entertainments; and his letters are shorter and fewer than in those other years. Doubtless among his friends are many fine ladies. They are cultured, intelligent, educated, beautiful, fascinating. He has grown away from the conditions and impediments of his youth, has lost the cruder feelings of an undisciplined mind and heart, and has become a worldly man. His affections now go out to those about him whom he sees and admires, their blandishments allure and capture his love, and the plain face he knew in other days that had only the charm of love-lit eyes to make it beautiful is almost, it may be entirely, forgotten.

Such, I am sorry to record, were the thoughts of that little, foolish woman standing near the window in a soiled dress that fair morning, neglect-

ing a needed breakfast to indulge a pet misery, after the manner of her sex from the days of Mother Eve.

It was nearing evening when her day's work was completed, and Jennie was tired, but one duty remained yet to be performed ; and she threw a light shawl about her shoulders, and, leaving the house, walked briskly, as she had done lately for many weeks every day, to the village post-office.

“ Any letter for me ? ” she asked, mechanically and without hope, for she had been disappointed so often of late that hope had given way to discouragement.

“ Yes,” replied the clerk, pleasantly, as he handed her the long-looked-for missive, and stopped to mark the glow of pleasure that touched her cheek and the happy light that came into her eyes as she took it from his hand and hastily turned away.

With the reflections of the clerk we have little concern. It was easy to infer from his manner that he loved the young lady and would have been willing to take the place of her absent lover, —indeed, to occupy any place in her esteem if only permitted to love her and to tell his love. The appearance of the young lady in the post-office every day always shook him up so badly that, as he himself often observed, “ There's a goneness sort o' feelin' comes over me ez ef I

hedn't eat ennything for a week." This evening another feeling possessed him. "Thet Smith now is a mean whelp, er he wouldn't neglect her ez he does,—writin' her a letter once a month, an' she writin' to him twice a week reg'lar. D—n me, but she's too good fur *him!*" communed the clerk to himself, feelingly, as his eyes admiringly followed her out.

Jennie broke the seal and read the letter as she walked. Oh, the joy of the news it brought her! He was coming home at last. In a few days he would come and she would see him. And he calls her his own darling little woman, and promises that he will never leave her again, but that henceforth their paths and lives and loves shall be one and inseparable.

Swiftly she sped along the street and entered her home. With a full heart she ran to her room, and fell on her knees at her bedside and thanked God. The weight was lifted off her heart at last, and in the ending of all the weary days and weeks and months and years of waiting she saw the promise of a future, and knew that now she, too, would be happy,—ay, the happiest of the happy, for to be his wife was to be blessed above all women.

That night, when walking up and down the garden, whose roses were planted by her own hand, she felt the wondrous comfort of religious

trust and learned to know something of the strength, hope, and purity of never-ending, conscious life. The night was cold, and the dew fell upon her as she walked among the fragrant roses. But she felt warm, comfortable, happy, and thought, with a thrill, of "the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

All the succeeding days before his coming she felt herself a girl again, with a girl's purity, trust, and hope. She came and went with a song on her lips as in the olden days when to love was a revelation.

She told no one of his coming and yet it seemed as if the whole world knew of it. The sunshine said "He is coming," the trees whispered "He is coming," the noisy river laughed "He is coming," and in the glance of every eye was held the tale "He is coming."

And at the appointed time he came. She saw him sitting in the ferry-boat crossing the river, the oars dripping diamonds again in the sunlight as when he went away six years before.

She had arranged the little parlor for his reception; it had been reburnished and decorated until it shone with cleanliness, and was now filled with heliotrope, geranium, and mignonette.

Her dress was modest, for she knew that he best loved it so, being a plain brown cashmere, with linen collar and cuffs, and a tuberose at the

throat. Her mass of glossy black hair was smoothly brushed back from her pale forehead, glorified now by the light from those maidenly eyes.

She was sitting in the little parlor with her burning cheeks in her hands and her soul in her bright eyes, when a step sounded on the pavement and stopped at the door. It was a ringing step. She knew the step, for long ago she had trained her timid feet to keep pace with it at his side.

Then she sprang up and met him at the door. The door opened, and closed upon them locked in each other's arms. There was a wondrous look in her eager face which she turned upon him, illuminated by those great pleading eyes,—a look such as only a woman knows and which no man fully understands. It was a very quiet meeting, and she said nothing,—said nothing at all, only bowed her head on his shoulder, put her hand up to his bearded face, and crept into his arms like a tired child.

“Why, Jennie darling, you are crying !”

It was quite true ; and when he tenderly lifted her face full to his own, her hot tears dropped on his hand.

## CHAPTER XI.

“This tale will not be told in vain if it shall be found to illustrate the great truth, that guilt, though it may attain temporal splendor, can never conquer real happiness; that the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission, and, like the ghosts of the murdered, forever haunt the steps of the malefactor; and that the paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace.”—SCOTT.

THE change of scene, the relaxation of overstrained nerves, and the peace and quiet of the surroundings produced their effect upon an organization nervously sensitive by nature, and which had undergone lately the strain of both physical and mental anguish. It was pleasant to be in the country again. It was pleasant to see the old familiar faces, to hear the old familiar voices, to watch the rushing river and the flying birds, and to visit the well-remembered scenes of boyhood and school-boy days.

It was on a sunny day in May that William, sitting with Jennie in the grove of pine, back of the village, after a walk together through the country, said, earnestly, as though resuming the conversation of six years ago,—

“Jennie, when shall we be married?”

For many years afterwards he remembered how she dropped her lashes, blushed a rosy red, and crept close to his side, then suddenly looked up into his eyes with a solemn gaze, and said,—

“I am ready any day to be your wife.”

For many years he remembered her reply, and how the day closed, and the west glowed with purple and gold flecked with silver clouds, as on that other day back of the years when they parted in the woods. For many years he remembered how the evening came on as they sat there looking over the landscape occupied with strange reflections; came on in the glory of a tropical sunset, big pillows of gorgeously-colored clouds piled high on the edge of the world and the god of day reclining on them, “burning the threshold of the night.”

A week later they were married.

It was the plainest of weddings. There was no display or fuss. Everybody was invited, but only a few attended the ceremony. The parents of Jennie were there of course, and William’s mother, and the old school-teacher. Mame Bartlett was bridesmaid, and Sally Chichester and Lucy Brown “assisted.” These three remembered the climbing of the old oak and blushed. Jennie remembered it too, and looked happy. Jack Potter, an old friend of William’s from the days of his infancy, acted as groomsman; and the Methodist

preacher married them. Gorham & Son did not attend in person, but they were represented by their gift to the married pair, a pretty little set of tea things in fine china, at once a useful present and a graceful token of a wish to blot out and forgive the wrongs of the past.

The post-office clerk, Mr. Hezekiah McStrad-dle-tree, was present, but, owing to wounded feelings which he strove in vain to conceal and which at length overcame him, he soon sadly withdrew. The scene reminded him of "Pilgrim's Progress." "It are like Wanity Fair," he said, "Wanity and wanity and wexation of spirit."

When all the guests had gone and they were left alone, they sat in the little parlor close together very happy. It did not seem as if they were married man and wife, but rather as though they were children again met after a long separation and renewing old remembrance of childhood's scenes and pleasures.

To her the tall bearded man at her side with the easy composure of a man of the world seemed to be very far removed from the awkward, slender boy of other days, and perhaps this difference caused her to love him with a deeper awe than before, but the toss of the head, the tone of voice, the ways and the smile of the man were the same as of old and brought back the old-time familiarity and love.

To him Jennie appeared to have changed but little, except to have become thinner, sadder, and more womanly. She was the same true-hearted, natural, loving child, innocent alike of culture and of wrong that had charmed his restless life when a boy ; and looking at her now and remembering the past, he could truly say, for all her faithfulness and constancy, for all her truth and trust, for all her deep and boundless love for him, he loved her !

As the spring advanced they often drove out together in the warm weather for many miles up and down the smooth road skirting the river-shore. One day they changed their drive and explored a sandy little driveway that branched off from the highway and led through a stretch of shady woods in the back country. The tangled growth of brier, tree, and bush extended on either hand far away into the cool, dark wilderness. They drove slowly through the narrow road far into the valley of shade. About them the great trees grew closer to the road, and the shadows deepened and the squirrels dropped nuts rattling down through the leaves. Before them a rabbit emerged from the bushes and bounded straight down the road.

Jennie, sitting close to her husband, her hat removed, and her fingers playing with its ribbons, turned suddenly, with an impulsive gesture, towards him, and, lifting her great black eyes to his face, said,—

“We will always be happy, I love you so!”

Instantly she was gathered to his heart, and held there in a close embrace, as if something had threatened to take her from him, or as if he meant to treasure her and make her his lifetime comfort and joy.

The tree-tops stirred, touched by a passing breeze, and the squirrels leaped from tree to tree, as she looked into his eyes and saw the look of determination there. The resolute look changed to tenderness under her glance, and he said,—

“Jennie, *we will be happy!* All our life shall be passed in trying to make each other happy, and, living thus, God will send us happiness!”

How the end of the sylvan road was reached, how the horse turned into the highway leading to the village, William did not know. He only knew that he took his girlish bride in his embrace, knew that her soft cheek rested against his face in utter confidence, knew that he kissed her willing lips again and again, knew that his little wife in murmured words, with burning face and tender caresses, received his love, and that she returned it, saying how dear he was to her, and how she loved and loved, and how she loved him.

And so, clasped in each other’s arms, they continued their homeward drive across the rolling hills and through the fragrant woods.

William greatly enjoyed the peaceful life that greeted him each day. It was like a new, an unknown joy, or—a blessing. It was so different from the stirring scenes and mad conflict of the city, where the battle of life, the strivings for success, the intense activity of mind and heart and soul are found. There were recollections of the past, of the time when the very peacefulness of the village was an offence, and he longed for turmoil and excitement even as he now longed for rest. Those boyish days he could never forget. But much of the ambitious irritability of youth had been outgrown during his six years of life and labor in the city, and now, calmer, more self-composed, and a man among men, he cared less for exciting scenes, and could abandon himself more graciously than heretofore to the delights of the country. The companionship of his wife made the days very sweet. He felt that now he commanded the best conditions of success. He believed that with a wife's help and encouragement a man can do worthy deeds in the world. He knew his wife believed in him, and in her society he almost forgot that he had ever toiled or needed still to toil, and as the happy hours fled he became almost as lazy as the villagers themselves.

One indolent afternoon he was awakened from a day-dream, into which he would still relapse at

times as when a boy, by his wife coming to his side in the little parlor where he lay outstretched on the lounge and holding up before him something which he at first supposed to be a circus-poster, but which, on a closer view, resolved itself into a patch bed-quilt. It was a marvel of colors and little pieces joined together into one harmonious whole by infinite skill, patience, and labor,—one of those *chef d'œuvres* of a past age in which our good grandparents used to delight. She held it outspread before him, her timid eyes and flushed face just visible above its edge.

“I made it,” she murmured. “It’s for our bed when we go to housekeeping.”

She watched his face as she spoke, trying to see if it pleased him. But if she had ever had any fear of his want of appreciation it was quickly dispelled.

With a swift movement he arose and gathered her, with the quilt wrapt around her, in his arms, and sank into a chair, holding her on his lap and caressing her like a child.

“God bless you for a loving little woman!” he exclaimed, impetuously. “And you sewed this all yourself, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

“With your needle, stitch by stitch?”

“Yes.”

He wrapped her tighter in the flowery patch-

work, and held her close to him, then he smiled : “ And how long did it take you to finish it ? ”

Without suspicion she replied, “ About six months ! ”

Perhaps under other circumstances her reply would have caused him to laugh, for certainly it was a mere waste of time and labor to spend six months over a thing which could be bought for two dollars in the stores ; but it so happened that just then he did not see the laughable. He saw only the untiring labor of his best friend, the devoted love of his true wife in that crude though treasured patch-work,—crude in design and execution,—treasured, because in every stitch of it and through every hour of the many weary days in which that little loving hand had labored on it there was love and love and love for him.

How the slightest things, the commonest deeds, when inspired by love, enoble life ! There was more in the painstaking, patient toil by which that simple flowered quilt was made to touch her husband’s heart that day than in all the warm caresses which in the happy hour that followed she showered so lavishly upon him !

And still on other days she showed him other treasures prudently prepared and laid up by her against the day of housekeeping,—including, among other things, a varied store of table-linen, bed-linen, tides, curtains, and rugs. She produced

these things one by one, at different times, with a grave delight which showed to her patient listener how her energy of love had entered into them and how dear they were to her. To William it seemed astonishing that he should come to have so deep an interest in each one of these various articles as they were successively presented before him. He had never spent a thought upon them heretofore. His knowledge of them was exceedingly limited. He could not have told the difference between a table-cover and a bed-sheet if left to his own unaided judgment, or distinguished that formless garment, a woman's night-dress, from a ruffled pillow-slip. To have been required to define the distinction between real lace and mosquito-netting would have puzzled him sorely. Yet the more he looked and listened the stronger grew his interest, until at length it would have been difficult to say whether his wife or himself was most pleased with the paraphernalia she laid out and exhibited. A month before and he would have cared nothing for such things, would have despised them ; now he was pleased with the possession of a zebra bed-quilt, and in ecstasies over a woman's slipper. Such is man !

But the effect upon him was not unlike that of awaking from a dream. He felt that he had rested now a long while, and rested very pleas-

antly, but that it was time to be up and doing. His little wife had done her part towards preparing for a home, and now it became his duty to supply that home. Hitherto he had dwelt only upon their union and happiness, and now that all that he had thought and wished was truly his, it remained only to provide a home wherein their happiness might be long enjoyed. He resolved to secure a home and hedge it round with love and establish it firmly in a prosperous business, without which no home is truly happy.

It was finally determined, after many counsels held and arguments heard pro and con, to locate in the West. With the courage of youth they hoped to so live and labor that, through mutual help and constancy, a way would open to comfort and independence. William no more doubted achieving success than he doubted his own existence. It was still as easy as the drawing of the breath. Under the spur of his grand ambition it was easy for him to believe in himself, easy to believe it as simple a thing to rise to distinction in the world as to plead a cause or smoke a cigar.

While the busy preparations went on in the house to properly outfit these young emigrants, William carelessly sauntered about the town, mingling freely with the people, conversing with friends and discussing school-boy frolics with those who had once been his schoolmates. Perhaps his

unassuming manner and friendly hearty greeting of those whom he knew made him seem less objectionable to the people than when a boy. Still it was quite clear from remarks made and glances cast as he passed that an old grudge subsisted which nothing that he could do would ever entirely uproot or remove. It was felt that he had always respected himself, and somehow or other that fact was treasured up against him ; and while it might be fairly conceded that no one disputed his worth, or denied that he was worthy of all respect, yet it was generally conceived improper for a man to respect himself, and proper that he should be made to feel what men who had no respect for themselves thought of a fellow of that kind. He was made to feel their displeasure accordingly.

Not that he received this treatment from all the people ; it would be a slander to so allege. There were many kind souls in Slopingdale who loved and honored him. There were many who esteemed and respected him. All such are expressly excepted out of the foregoing general remark. And perhaps, too, he noticed the ill treatment too sensibly, perhaps often magnified it. It was possible to do this, because the keenest pain it brought him came from the reflection that it was ungenerous and undeserved.

His indifferent reception, however, did not long

occupy his thought, for there soon occurred an event which, from its startling nature, drove this, as well as other thoughts, for the time being, out of mind.

It was on a day in June, during one of these jaunts about town, that William found himself the central figure of a group of men and boys gathered before the bar-room door of the "Gentle Influence," a hotel of long standing in the village, and, perhaps by reason of its seductive name, of great popularity. The crowd, it must be confessed, was mixed. It was also peculiar. There was the usual swaggering air of inferior superiority, and indifference to bare feet and torn breeches. There was the customary picturesque apparel, and want of apparel, common to those who cared little for what they wore and less for what they did or said. At the time of which I write the gift of loud speech was abundant in every small community. One could get plain, embroidered, and decorated specimens on every street corner. And for glittering streaks of unique diction a choice assortment was kept in every bar-room. There was therefore a generous supply of vigorous speech; and invective and tobacco-spit flowed freely. There was, furthermore, an originality in the conversation, albeit loud and profusely copious, not often found in polite society, and the expletives with which it was fringed, embellished,

and ornamented gave to the otherwise plain talk a wonderful force and charm.

William stood in the midst of the crowd apparently unconscious of the din about him as he watched the face of our old friend, Colonel Erastus S. Swampus, who was deeply interested in a newspaper. The colonel suddenly broke forth with an execration, which silenced even the crowd that stood there. He at once began a harangue, inimitable in its way, upon the prevalence of crime, the burden of which was the present deplorable scarcity of hangings. He held the newspaper in his hand and brandished it wildly by way of emphasis of his views. His attitude promised a speech, and a circle soon formed about him to enjoy the fun, for whether the colonel was sober and indignant or drunk and excited did not clearly appear, and required always a nice and penetrating judgment to determine.

“Now here is a case,” pursued the colonel, continuing his remarks and striking the newspaper impressively with his hand, “thet illustrates er—my position squarely, and proves—er—in—er—conclusive manner that mankind is bad, and womankind—er—demme—worse. Not that I think it necessary to deplore the condition of women,” deprecatingly observed the colonel, with a frightful smile, “for the devil will get ‘em anyhow. But I—er—confess to considerable interest

in the—er—fate of man. I would like to see, say one-quarter of the population hanged for the good of the three-quarters left. Gentlemen, I tell you the only way to make this world good is to hang the wicked. So long as they live they will breed others like 'em, and not all the preachers on earth, though each one of 'em should be filled full of chicken up to the neck every day of his life as long as he lives, will ever be able to prevent the —er—demoralization of society,—now you hear me! This 'ere case," continued the colonel, paternally, "shows that I am right. Now 'ere was a young man courtin' a female woman, a maiden of his species; he ruins the gal and—er—runs away. Then when—er—his whereabouts is discovered and she writes to him, wot does he do? Does he act fair by the woman as has trusted him? Does he stand by and protect her as has loved him? No! He does not. On the contrary—now wot do you s'pose, on the contrary, he does, eh?"

The colonel turned sharply around and looked upon his auditory, as he asked the question, and stopped, but his sweeping glance saw only open-mouthed wonder and suspense on the faces about him. Proud of a talent which met such unconscious and sincere recognition, he smiled a frightful smile, and continued,—

"Wot does he do? Why, he hires a fellow to do away with the girl. He sends the fellow fifty

dollars, and promises him another fifty when the job is done. And the fellow is a worthy tool of his employer and sets about to do his work. The fellow goes to the girl and tells her that he is a messenger from her lover, and that he is to take her to see him in secret,—to take her all alone in a little boat out on the sea at night to meet him on a big ship that he says will be there at the risin' of the moon. The girl is glad, for she believes the story and thinks she will soon see the man she loves. So the fellow takes her in the little boat and rows out through the breakers in the darkness of the night, far away from the shore and out of hearin'; but no light is seen and no ship comes, and the girl gets afraid and suspects foul treatment and begs to return home, when the fellow crouches down in the boat and creeps and crawls along, quiet-like, till he reaches her, and then he grabs her and holds her mouth shut, and forces her head into the gurglin' water and holds her there, her body in the boat and her head in the sea, till her struggles cease and life is stilled, then drops the limp body, fastened to a bar of iron, into the dark deep and rows back to the shore.”

As the colonel paused a shudder passed through the crowd and no one spoke. It seemed as if each one saw the murdered girl as she hung over the edge of the little boat and sank in the cruel

sea. The colonel glanced at his newspaper a moment, and then went on,—

“The job hed been so well done that no one suspected that the girl was—er—drownded and murdered; it was thought she hed gone to seek her lover or to visit friends in another town. The fellow was not suspected, and he went about his usual business secure and safe. But somehow his —er—conscience troubled him,—although he got the extra fifty dollars, which ought have eased a conscience such as he possessed,—and he couldn’t sleep, and he became afraid of the sea, and turned colors when people looked at him, and started when they talked to him and looked behind him as if some one was followin’ him, until one night he—er—disappeared from the settlement.”

The colonel paused to take a fresh chew of tobacco, and, with teeth closely pressed upon the quid, continued,—

“It might hev bin a month or so afterwards, thet a lot of sailors were splashin’ round in a ship’s yawl off the coast a-fishin’ fur sharks, when one of ‘em spied somethin’ afloat,—somethin’ sort o’ water-logged, part out of and part under water, on the waves. Comin’ closer they saw it was a human body, a drownded woman, and they hauled it aboard. The clothes was still a-clingin’ to the slight and willowy figure, and a rope was tied about her waist, and was sort of gnawed-off like

at the end, as if it had bin broken from an iron bar ; and there was a letter in her pocket and a ring on her finger and a handkerchief in her belt with her name on it, '*Julia*.' When the sailors got to shore, her parents came down to the beach among the crowd and recognized their dead child and wept and took her home sorrowing. But even then no one knew that she had bin murdered. The letter in her pocket was from *him*. The letter promised her fair, and offered her money to support her child, and spoke of old times and love and sich-like d—d nonsense, and it was believed that out of disappointment and remorse she hed gone and drownded herself. The loss of a little skiff some time before gave some probability to this—er—natural conjecture. She hed a grand funeral, fur she hed always bin a good girl, and the people loved her, wherefore this 'ere newspaper says that there in her beautiful Southern home, close to the soundin' sea, they made her grave and laid her in it, herself the fairest flower of all that flowery land, and all the people wept fur the poor dead mother bearin' her unborn babe."

And the colonel paused again, this time to wipe a tear from the end of his nose. He scratched his beard reflectively and changed his quid to the other cheek before he proceeded.

" Lemme think,—it was shortly after the findin' of the corpse that the lover and the fellow wot

hed drownded the girl met in New York. It was a stormy meetin', and roused bad blood in both of 'em. 'God d—n you and your money!' said the fellow, when the lover offered to pay him for his silence. 'Nothin' can keep me silent. The whole world shall know of it. What do I care for punishment? No sufferin' can be greater than I now feel, no punishment severer than I now bear,—even hangin' I believe would be a relief to me,—in which opinion I cordially agree with the fellow. No, sir," parenthetically mused the colonel, "it *couldn't* hev bin worse. The fellow wouldn't hev suffered more in bein' hanged, and it would hev bin a condemned sight better fur the world at large." And the colonel smiled widely. "Well, as I was a-sayin', they hed a meetin'. It was in the private rooms of the lover, who hed a sort of position in a bank in New York, and was a-livin' in good style, and sported round like a handsome young fellow as he was——"

William started. "What was his name?" he asked, without attempting to conceal his deep interest.

Everybody turned at once to look at the man who dared to interrupt the speaker; but the colonel, for once, affected not to hear the interruption, and coolly went on with his tale.

"I was about to say, gentlemen, thet they hed a meetin' and quarrelled, and the lover pulled a

pistol on the fellow, but afore he could discharge it the fellow—er—knocked him flat with a slung-shot and immediately left. The lover was badly hurt, and it was a miracle he didn't die, fur he hed a dreadful cut in the skull,—a three-cornered cut near the left temple, which ought hev killed him. But wot does he do?"

William again started and trembled.

"Why, he leaves his lodgin's the same night and disappears. And when the officers came fur him next day he was nowhere to be found. Fur, you see, the fellow hed tried to give him into custody, and hed made oath that he was 'accessory before the fact' to murder, and meant to hev him hang, even if he hed to hang 'longside of him, or on the same gibbet. P'r'aps it was as well that he didn't implicate himself jist then, or he might hev hanged himself, and the lover would never hev bin found and hanged,—which would hev bin a condemned insufferable pity. Well, the lover escaped, and must hev changed his name and appearance, fur he has never bin found, and it's thought he has gone to furrin parts. But this 'ere newspaper goes on to say,—all this wot I'm tellin' you happened four years ago,—to say that a month ago jist, the fellow wot drownded the girl dies, and before he dies he makes a confession, in which he tells the whole story of the crime,—tells how he was induced to do the job, and how

the poor girl pled and struggled fur life, and how every night of his life since thet day he dreamt of going through the horrid business of drownding that girl, and——”

A wild peal of laughter came from the bar-room, followed by a striking set of profane remarks, which were suddenly chopped off by a closing door. The crowd soon investigated the cause of the disturbance, while the colonel temporarily suspended his remarks. It was not difficult to discover. Some wag had secretly put a drop of croton oil in the barkeeper's grog, and that worthy young gentleman's nimble and expeditious movements as he departed produced a scene which was extremely enlivening, and which even the name of the hotel, mild though it was, tended rather to intensify than calm.

“Now, that's a ‘gentle influence,’ aren't it?” sarcastically observed a citizen, with irony on his lips and a red patch on his trousers.

But William knew nothing of what had happened. He stood there rooted to the spot, unable to stir. He heard nothing save confused sounds, saw nothing but the red-bearded face of the colonel, on whom his eyes were bent as if fascinated. When the colonel again took up the thread of his narrative, it seemed to him as though an inexorable fate was weaving a sure web in which to entangle his old friend and forging a thunderbolt to strike

him dead. The question, Can it be Ashleigh? wearily dinned in his brain, and the answer came, fiendlike, into his ears, Yes, it is Ashleigh! The words of the colonel mingled confusedly with the sounds in the street, and seemed to come from afar as he spoke.

“In thet confession as I was tellin’ about,” blandly pursued the colonel, “the fellow describes this ’ere lover. He says thet Edwin Parker was a handsome——”

“Parker?”

“A handsome man of heavy build and fine figure; a young man of p’r’aps twenty-five, pale-faced, noble bearin’, and brown, curly-haired——”

“Brown? You mean black?”

“Brown, curly-haired, smooth-faced, and havin’ fine black eyes, which sparkled in excitement like a Turk’s.”

Perhaps by reason of his interruption the colonel paused here, with his keen eye bent upon William. He went on, addressing his words to him and looking him straight in the eye.

“The sing’larist thing is thet the fellow remembers jist where he hit Parker with thet three-cornered slung-shot. He describes the spot exactly. It is on the left temple, jist back two inches from the frontal bone of the forehead, and an inch and a half above and forward of the ear. The wound made was three-cornered, and measures

a half-inch along each side of the cut. It is like so." And the colonel illustrated it by a diagram on the corner of the paper, rapidly drawn with a lead-pencil, thus:  $\triangle$ . "And that wound ought to be found now, just about right here" (walking swiftly up to William, striking off his hat and placing his long, bony forefinger on the supposed spot on his head). "As I live I almost expected to find that mark on your head, young man, you looked so scared. You've bin away a good while and might hev been the man. Mebbe you know the man? I ain't frightened you, hev I, eh? Why, that mark 'll find that man wherever he may hide in the world, and I shall see him hanged yet, demme if I sha'n't! What? Get some water, quick!"

William had fainted and fallen to the earth.

In the momentary excitement which followed the bar-room was deserted, and the street echoed under the footsteps of running men hurrying to swell the crowd that stood about the bar-room door. The colonel needed no assistance to revive the sick man. A liberal application of water was sufficient. In a minute he opened his eyes, arose, and staggered to a seat.

"The sun's too hot fur the city chap; better get a bandbox fur him!" suggested the citizen with a red patch on his trousers. The crowd laughed at the joke.

The colonel dropped the water-pitcher and pulled off his coat. "Any remarks against him," he observed, significantly, "you will jist consider as made against me,—er—against *me*, d'ye understand?"

It is to be inferred that the colonel's meaning was understood, for there was nothing further said, and the sick man soon arose, and, under the colonel's guidance and support, walked down the street. When they parted at the door, the colonel, at his request, handed him the newspaper.

That night when all was still through the house, William drew his chair to the table and unfolded the newspaper to the light. It was a copy of the *New York Tribune*, three days old, and contained the full details of the dreadful story which the colonel had told. It was written in graphic style, with startling head-lines, and illustrated with cuts of the murderer and his victim, and the lover and the slung-shot, and the wound on the left temple. It also contained the confession of Jackson Sparr, the murderer, and the history of Julia Fenwick, the murdered girl. The details were minute and circumstantial, even the certificate of the notary who took the confession, that it was made "after being first informed that he must unavoidably die and in the full belief of speedy death," being faithfully preserved and reproduced.

After reading the sickening tale, William folded the paper, placed it in his pocket, pushed the lamp

from him, and leaned back in his chair overcome with horror. How many things now came to mind to prove that Ashleigh was this man Parker, the murderer! There had always been something about the man mysterious, something that told of a secret history concealed from sight. He had never told the friend of his heart of his native place, but had ever striven to conceal it. Was not their speedy friendship a plot of his to throw off suspicion in case of arrest by enlisting friends in his behalf under a new name? Their acquaintance began somewhere near the time of his quarrel with Sparr, when he received that blow on the temple. And that scar? Did not that fix his identity? Did it not, as the colonel said, "find him out wherever he may hide in the world"? How he had tried to conceal that mark! How he had trained his curls to cover it! and how startled he was that day on which his fever broke when he knew that it had been seen! And all without avail! He was henceforth a marked man, —a Cain, with every man's hand raised against him to slay him. His wife even would learn to know that she was married to a murderer. Poor Lilian! And were they married? Could Parker carry through to the end the bold game he was playing? It was successful so far, but would he accomplish his dream of wealth and power and escape justice to be happy despite his crime? Or

would the day of reckoning come, that dread avenger of the wronged, when all the infamy of the past will be laid bare and punished, and he, poor fool, be made to feel the lash of long-delayed retributive justice?

The clock struck eleven, and William broke off his reflections and prepared to retire. There was a sense of security throughout all the house, and as he entered the room where his wife lay sleeping her gentle breathings fell like balm upon his perturbed spirit, and when he laid his head upon the pillow beside her a sense of innocence and purity swept over his soul, and he felt that no degree of rank however grand, if secured by crime, could ever give that blessed peace that comes through the possession of a clear and quiet conscience.

But he slept not for a long time. There was that in the hour and all surroundings which strangely softened his heart towards the man who had been his friend. At first he had felt a horror of the man who could do so damning a deed of crime. But knowing that that man was none other than Harry Ashleigh, his old friend, he shrank from condemning him. The deepest impression now left on his mind from this horrible disclosure seemed to be a sorrowing pity for his friend. He could not think him altogether bad, he could not hate him, he could not deliver him up to justice. Shocked, indeed, by the terrible

tale, feeling the utmost revulsion against the atrocious deed, his mind still sought to separate the crime from the criminal, condemning one, pitying the other, and his heart still held fast, undimmed by the past or present, the dear memories of their old friendship. It may be possible that the Infinite Intelligence heard the prayer that linked the name of Ashleigh with the pure and good that night, and smiled approval upon him who, having uttered it, sweetly slept!

Once more summer reigned at Slopingley. Once more July was here with its oppressive heat. Once more from the verdure-clad hills behind the town, which promised a plentiful harvest, to the hovering trains on the horizon, which seemed to be waiting to carry that harvest to market, there was a general summer glow. Once more a slight breeze, stirring aimlessly among the branches of the water-willows, rippled the surface of the river into an aqueous goose-flesh under the fervent heat of the blazing sun.

The time had come at last to leave for the West. They were to start the next morning. William was at the river-shore arranging nets for a last night's fishing. Jennie, in the midst of packed household goods, restlessly wandered through the rooms. She was thinking of old times and of the fateful future in the wide West, when the door-

bell rang and a strange lady appeared before her at the door, and was ushered into the little parlor. A single glance showed her to be a singularly beautiful young woman. She was richly, but plainly, dressed in one shade of softest brown from bonnet to boots. She had an air of refinement and composure belonging only to those of rank, and wonderfully expressive dark blue eyes. She spoke fluently, with a smile, as she introduced herself and passed the civilities of the day, while her great blue eyes took in and retained every detail of the face and figure before her.

The sun stole into the room through the latticed shutters and fell upon the faces of the women as they sat there, lighting up those features that shone in marked contrast to each other,—the one fair-skinned, brown-haired, blue-eyed, and with Grecian cast and self-possession, the other pale, black-haired, black-eyed, shy, but spirited, and without tact or composure. Two women could hardly be more unlike.

Their interview was of little importance. In quite a casual way the stranger learned that the lady before her was Mrs. William Smith, that she had been married lately, that her husband had lived in New York, that he was a lawyer, and they were going West in the morning. The stranger would not wait to see her husband,—it was not necessary; she could consult him by letter, and—

the stranger left. The two women stood up and walked to the door together, thus still more fully emphasizing the difference between them. They never forgot each other.

“Only a pretty country girl!” thought the lady, as she swept from the house and walked down the street.

But when, a half-hour later, she took her way to the ferry and passed a group of men standing about their fishing-nets, one of the men started from the crowd and ran towards her, and, all wet and mud, stood at her side trembling as he looked down into her upturned face lighted with a sad smile.

“Lilian! you here!”

“Walk with me to the boat, please,” she said, giving him her hand with the grace of old days. “Never mind the mud and wet,—we need not mind, and must not excite remark. William,” she continued, looking into his eyes earnestly as they walked, “I did not come here to disturb, to undo anything. Nobody knows me. I came only to see *her*, your wife,—I could not live without seeing her. I have seen her,—she is a good little girl, I suppose, and I hope you are—content?”

He bowed his head. “And you?” he asked.

“I am married to Ashleigh.”

“And he is kind to you?”

“Yes.”

“Is he—is he now in the city?”

“Yes; and doing well. He bought an interest in the bank, and is a partner. We shall pass the summer in the White Mountains. William, if—I can—if we can do anything for you,—perhaps you will permit me to supply your library?”

“Lilian, say no more of that; I shall work as before, and earn my bread by the sweat of my face. I think I prefer it so. If ever I succeed it will be, in the future as in the past, by my own unaided labor and toil. But there is nothing, nothing troubling Ashleigh, is there?”

“Nothing that I know. Why?”

“I thought perhaps—a fever,—he had one once.”

“No; he is quite well.”

“And in good spirits?”

“Can you ask——? Yes.”

She did not know. He bore it bravely through. God help them that the bolt might not fall! God forgive him when he comes to die!

“Lilian, I am glad to see you again. I shall likely never see you again. You have not changed much. You never can change—to me.”

“Nor you to me; never!”

They had reached the boat, and the ferryman was waiting. Once again their eyes met. They looked steadily at each other and thought of part-

ing and of what might have been. They looked at each other for the last time. Then they separated, with a hand-clasp that thrilled the heart and a whispered blessing on their lips, and she stepped into the boat and was gone—forever!

Yet the morning found him calm and hopeful. It found him shaking hands with friends and taking leave of Slopingdale. And the sunrise that struck the rippling river like a sheet of flame covered him and Jennie, and all the world, with effulgent glory down by the river-shore.

## CHAPTER XII.

“ And now there is but one of all my blood  
Who will embrace me in the world to be,  
This hair is his.”—TENNYSON.

“ In the night of death hope sees a star,  
And listening love can hear the rustling of a wing.”  
INGERSOLL.

“ My eyes are dim with childish tears,  
My heart is idly stirred ;  
For the same sound is in my ears  
Which in those days I heard.”—WORDSWORTH.

“ God forgive me, but I've often thought  
Had I God's power or He my love,  
We'd have a different world  
From this we live in.”—HOLLAND.

NATURE renews her works. Her wooded temples are rebuilt and her ravaged fields repaired. The woodman's axe may fell the trees, but the forest grows again. The valleys ploughed by shot and torn by shell yield their harvests another year. The dying leaves on every tree are a prophecy that spring will come again. The winds of winter, the cold, the ice, and snow are only for a day that soon is gone. Summer still returns with warmth and song and bloom.

It is the same with man. Although sorrow

may enter a human life, cankering the heart and weighing down the weary spirit till life itself becomes a burden too grievous to be borne, and times come when, thinking of the past, one feels that joy is dead, and that neither day nor night, mirth nor music, the sunshine on nature's face nor the smiles on human faces can ever waken the soul to pleasure again ; yet still we know that the deepest griefs cannot forever last. In the silent lapse of time—that tender healer of the wrongs and pangs of earth—all sorrows lessen and all sufferings heal, for with every passing year and month and hour some newer good, some better hopes, some added joys are born to pleasure and revive earth's saddened hearts. Ah ! William Smith, William Smith, there are few indeed who escape this world without knowing sadness ! Somewhere in the heart of every one there is a shrine sacred to the memory of a buried hope. It may have been a thwarted purpose once dear to the heart, the changing of which left all after-life ragged at the ends ; it may have been a love experience, whether in youth or manhood, which, like a subtle perfume, steals evermore upon the sense, recalling the lost one and arousing emotions that cause the tears to flow. Was it a thwarted purpose of life ? The heroic days of boyhood, when a career on the rolling deep was the *ultima thule* of happiness and the leaping pulse longed to be a

sailor, are long since past away, and the slightest hopes of those days have never been realized. Life brought only the common lot of a laborer who delves and digs and toils for daily bread, but the old memory has its shrine in the heart, and there the fond spirit often bows, while the tears flow for the long-lost hope. Was it a love experience? It is many years ago since in the lousy days of youth you walked the fields with Mary as you and she went berrying. But Mary now is sleeping under the greensward, her blue eyes closed forever where the daisies and violets sweetest bloom, and the little fingers of your darling that once picked the berries, the stains of which you tried in vain to kiss away, have long since lost their cunning and mouldered into dust. And now you visit her lonely grave in the spring-time and drop tears and blessings upon its flowery mound, and go away sorrowing for the dead past that left you only a life-long regret.

Merciful, therefore, is the fate that lightens the heart under trouble! Blessed are the fingers of time that smooth our cares from the mind! Without such helps our condition would be intolerable. If our hearts were not light we would die, and if our griefs were not relieved we should not be able to retain our sanity!

And now our story ends. We know that the

new life in the West was full of promise. There are no limits to the prospects that rise everywhere to the sight fair as the morning to the fond eyes of the young. And a new land is a land of hope.

Nor were any natural expectations disappointed in the realization. Business from the beginning was good, and the people were very appreciative and kind. There seemed to be something about them resembling the country in which they lived, something broad, expansive, and unconfined, like the wide prairies and limitless plains. There was little ceremony in their manner, to be sure, but they got along very well without it. A man's measure was soon taken there. His armor of wealth, culture, dignity, or any other of the adventitious aids of manhood in which men love to encase themselves, availed little to win respect ; it was soon penetrated by the keen glances of criticism. A man soon felt that he must stand before the people solely as a man, relying only upon his manhood for merit and regard, and he adapted himself to the situation accordingly.

“A gentleman!” exclaimed one of these men, with something of the breeziness of the wide prairies in his manner. “It is the man that should be highly polished, not his boots!”

We see in time a little cottage in the suburbs of the Western city where the happy couple live.

It stands near the parks where all the summer-time the people gather and the children play. It was not always so comfortably arranged and furnished. At first it contained only four small rooms, then afterwards a front was added of four larger rooms, and then a dining-room and kitchen were attached, and a barn and stable built on the end of the lot, and, after a while, an adjoining lot was purchased and thrown into a lawn and garden. Thus also the house was furnished, piece by piece being added as could be afforded from time to time until the home was complete,—the zebra bed-quilt, in constant use from the first, now enjoying the post of honor and covering the bed in the guest-chamber. The home may be modest and unassuming, but it is theirs and paid for, and they are happy there, like the birds in their cosey nest.

Yes, they are happy. The occupation of the day and the delights of home in the evening,—the prosperous business and the cheerful home make life happy. When they sit together sometimes listening to the music of religious services in the church hard by, when they watch the playful, laughing child as he climbs from one to the other to be kissed, when the bell-chimes have ceased, and the hymns are sung, and the services ended, and the people gone, they often look at each other and confess their happiness.

It may be true that periods of reflection come, busy though the life may be and happy the home, in which the demon of ambition returns to ruffle all the calm of life and distress the soul. Such times doubtless do come. They are trying times ; they stir the soul to its depths. Then comes conflict, and discontent, and unhappiness. In the effort to conquer ambition a soul-struggle must be undergone, the severity of which is known alone to those who have suffered it. Ambition can only be conquered by patience ; it can only be overcome by following the peaceful routine of daily life. Will the sufferer have the requisite patience ? Will he pursue his daily toil uncomplainingly and so come off victor ? That memorable struggle in the days of youth, there on the hill back of Slopingdale, was a gallant wrestle against ambition, though it ended in defeat. That later conflict in New York was a severe trial for manly fortitude, and wellnigh broke the heart to win the victory. Again the struggle comes, again the will gives way, again the battle must be fought, and again work, persistent work, resolution, and patience must conquer it. Who can tell what the end will be ?

Perhaps, too, times come when the old life, with that other love that was once so sweet, rises up, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the past and fills the heart with a nameless regret. That fateful

passage in an ingenuous life can never be hidden away in forgetfulness. It may be pressed back, forced down, and covered up ; it may be thought to be utterly extinguished, like the dying embers that have been stamped out ; but it bursts forth again, and in its lurid flames the past is re-read. And then the melancholy days come. Then sorrow, longing, heaviness of soul, and all the nameless pangs of remorse are felt again.

But in the labors of the busy hours that follow these sad feelings pass away, and the industrious worker comes in time to feel less and less interest in the past, until at last, perhaps, he regains full self-control, and can say, without emotion, “the children of Alice call Bartram father.”

One day he receives a letter from Slopingdale. It contains only one line,—

“The hounds are on his track.

“SWAMPUS.”

And then, about that time, on another day, the skies lower and the whole world suddenly becomes girt about with grief and gloom,—it is the day on which the child died,—the day that took away the comfort and the hope of life.

Ah ! William Smith, William Smith, you had been living lately not so much for self and selfish ends as for your little child,—and now the child is gone !

The sunshine falls in checkered rifts upon the floor as in the days when the baby creeping there clutched it in his chubby hands, but those little hands are still and cold now,—still and cold forever.

You are holding the child still, though it has been dead over an hour. You cannot bear to lay it down, or give it to another, or go away. You sit there quiet and unheeding, watching the wan little face, kissing the cold fingers that will never again reach and clasp yours, looking down upon the white lids that have closed over the blue eyes shutting in their answering look of love forever. Tenderly you caress the still little form, hushing it in your arms, and rocking to and fro as you had so often done before to soothe it to sleep. Strange thoughts overcome you as you now and then bend down to kiss that white, waxen face. And the neighbors come and crowd the rooms, the noisy cries of the draymen come up from the street, the undertaker, with his assistant, rudely enters to measure the child for its coffin, and you, saddened to death, still sit there quiet and unheeding, looking down at the cold little face, kissing it often and gently rocking in your arms the little form from which the soul has flown,—and all the world is nothing to you.

“Oh, my God, my God, these cold little hands!”

Poor father! Lead him away, lead him gently

away. Now take the child and prepare it for the tomb ; place the lilies on its silent bosom, white as its shroud, pure as the flown soul ; fold the waxen hands across the motionless breast and—close the lids of the coffin.

It is the suffering of a father that we witness. How the loss of his child touches him ! The baby was winsome and pretty ; it was just beginning to walk and talk, and it loved to lie in his arms and smile in his face saying “papa,” “papa,” with such gladness. It will never do so again,—nevermore.

“Never to listen to that prattling voice again, never to watch those tiny feet proudly pattering over the floor, never to hold those clinging little hands, never to feel those velvet arms around my neck any more, never to know my baby again, never again, never again. Oh heaven, this—this is more than I can bear !”

And now the child is in the casket, lying there in the midst of the satin and lilies as if in sleep, and the room is dark, and the coffin-lids no longer creak, and the undertakers are gone, and you feel that you must die unless you can weep ;—if you could only weep, only sit down there beside the child and weep !

Oh, try to think of other things ! Think of anything but your dead child. You must bear the affliction, bear it like a man. Try to think

of life as filled with sorrow ; think of it, too, as filled with joy. See, the sunshine steals into the room ; listen, the birds are singing in the trees ; look, happy faces crowd the street. The world still has its joys. It has not changed since yesterday. And your loved one shall live again. It goes down into the voiceless chambers of the silent dust to rise an immortal soul in the happy hereafter. Be comforted, your child is in another home brighter far than any that this world can give ; it is in your Father's house, where you shall meet your darling when you, too, at last go home.

Blessed tears, they have come at last !

And now you stand beside the open grave and hear the hard clods fall on the coffin. How cruel, ah, how cruel is death ! Oh, it is horrible to think of the grave, horrible to feel our dear ones torn from our sides, to lose our best friends, to be cut off from all the beauty, association, and love of those who are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and to lay these dear bodies in the cold, dark, dank earth to rot with worms ! Yet this is life. We are born to die. All things lead but to the grave. The earth itself, gray with age, is but the tomb of man. Follow our ambition as we may, success and glory will not endure ; at the end our share in all the pomp and beauty of the world is that our graves are green.

And now, the funeral over, a period of calm

has come. While your wife has gone to her rooms, attended by loving friends, you enter the home-like study so full of memories and seat yourself in your easy-chair close to the genial hearth, and, looking into the fire, think and think and think.

The past rises like a dream. You live again through all its well-remembered scenes. From the boughs of youth you pluck the fruit of joy. The happy days of youth, and hope, and love, how near they seem! how like yesterdays they come to mind, those halcyon days so fresh in the memory, though long ago buried under the weight of years! Life was a romance in those days. Then the world was beautiful and all the people were honorable. Then all colors were rose-color, all women angels, all hopes easy of fulfilment. Then existence was joy and life a poem.

How all this rises up like a ghastly mockery! How different is the life we live from that we thought to live when we were young!

Now you learn the meaning of character, how it is shaped and fashioned by the love, care, and anxiety of active life, which, like mallets in the hand of the cunning sculptor, outline stroke by stroke the perfect statue.

Perhaps you recall your married life, that union which is old as man and ever new. It had brought its graver cares. The little rill that babbled at your feet in the courtship days is a type

of courtship love. The shallow, noisy rill still flows on, but it flows for others now. Its fretful current no longer typifies your life. Behold the deep river with its strong current and solemn tones! such is your life as it flows down to the unknown sea.

Perhaps you recall that prolific cause of remorse, the first quarrel with your wife. You were tired and out of humor that night when you came home. Stalking moodily into the dining-room, you took your seat at the tea-table without raising your eyes from the floor, and heard with exasperation her complaining,—

“I have waited so long with tea. I do think you might come earlier.”

Then you should have raised your eyes and spoken kindly, and all would have been well. You looked up quickly with a harsh reply. Your look encountered a look as determined as yours; it lowered not under your steady gaze.

“There is no welcome for me when I come,” you said, “so why come early?”

The sneer was undeserved. Even in your anger you should have remembered how much you and she had done to make your marriage happy all these years, and how much you had need of each other. But you thought not of this at the time, and if she thought of it your unkind words quickly dispelled her tenderness. Swiftly she retorted,—

"I'm glad you were not welcomed ; you don't deserve it. Your heart has gone out into the world with your business. You do not bring it home any more. Oh, if you didn't love me, why did you marry me?"

You heard the words and sat astonished. This, then, was your recompense for all your self-denial and truth, your faithful vows fulfilled and obscure life. She was a woman, and, like her Mother Eve, could calmly reproach a man with being too kind to her and letting her have her own will, while he, true man, lived loving her, laboring and dying for her. The tone was strange, and the voice sounded far away. You scarcely remember your reply. You rose from the table, leaving its food untouched. Still her complaining voice went on, wearily upbraiding you. Then you left the house. You lighted a cigar and took a walk, and tried to get rid of thought. But your mind would not forget. Then you argued with yourself to prove your conduct correct. You were in the right. She did not meet you when you came home, as she should have done ; she annoyed you with a flippant remark when you entered the dining-room, which she should not have done ; she acted sulkily and disagreeably, and, true to woman's habit, had the first and last word,—and, altogether, she was to blame.

With such sophistry you beguile your intellect,

but your heart knows better, and through the long hours of the wakeful night it accuses you and robs you of rest, and the morning finds you weary, sad, and still angry.

And thus you lived for a week, a long and weary week.

And then the day came when your child, your boy, an angel now, was born, and there beside the couch of your suffering companion, her soulful eyes looking pleadingly up at you from the pillows, old differences were all forgotten and old offences all forgiven. You remember the joy of that hour, and still feel something of the peace which came and followed you through the after-years.

And this was only two years ago ! And now the child is dead !

Oh, God ! how your hopes centered in that child ! How lovingly you cared for it, and how fondly watched the flower-like unfolding of its beautiful young life ! Ah, well ! it is all over, and life is dark now, and the world is nothing to you. The watchful care that guarded helpless childhood so far with pride and joy, that waited so patiently at the little one's sick-bed with sorrow and fear,—sorrow for its suffering and fear of its dying,—is all past. O, the weary time, the long hours of the day, and the sleepless watches of the night that you passed bending over that fluttering little life

as it hovered now near, now away, from you, until at last it slipped away into the unknown land to be ever beautiful in eternal childhood ! You are alone in the world !

How vividly you see all these images as you sit there gazing into the grate, your eyes feeling like balls of fire, and your nails starting the blood from your palms !

Steps and knocking at the door. And still you sit there unheeding, sorrowing, dreaming ! How different is the life we live from that we thought to live when we were young !

Steps and knocking at the door. It is your wife. Rise, open those clenched hands, relax that frown, don't tremble so, open the door and let her come in. Lead her to the window ; listen, they are singing the *Te Deum* in the church hard by ; how the music swells upon the air ! It will do you good to hear it. How weak she is ! Ah, yes, there is need for your strength ; be you, therefore, strong. Take her in your arms as in the olden days, for you have need of each other now. Tenderly wipe away the tears from those flushed cheeks, gently put back the damp, tossed hair from the pale brow, bend down and kiss those trembling, pleading lips. Oh, how true they have been to you all these years !

The music rises, swelling like a flood, and sweeping in waves of harmony through the air.

Let its inspiration touch your heart and fill it with peace,—in the providence of God nothing truly good is ever destroyed. Father of all goodness be praised ! A sunbeam of heaven has gone out of your earthly home only to shine in a more enduring mansion in the skies for evermore. Never let go of that comforting hope. Cling to it. Living or dying hold it fast. That faith will not deceive you. Pattering little feet will be heard again in our Father's house, baby lips will be pressed once more in a happier life, and some music of that better land will contain your darling's voice !

They embrace, standing there at the window shedding tears as they listen to the solemn organ-tones.

A year has passed away and the world is bright once more. The pitying fingers of time have effaced the marks of care from the faces of the suffering.

Ashleigh had not been heard from for a long time. One day a letter came,—it was from a detective agency,—offering a large reward “for information which would lead to the apprehension and conviction of Edwin Parker, a man charged with murder.” Colonel Swampus evidently had suggested the letter ; but he little knew his man if he supposed this scheme would prove successful.

Ashleigh's old friend stood fast and true, neither duty nor reward having power to move him. Nor did he act wholly from a feeling of chivalry. The fate of Lilian was involved. Her happiness depended on his silence. Besides, the man might have repented. He could not shut the door of hope in the face of a penitent soul. In the excess of sympathy, which was ever his master-pain, he felt that no man is altogether bad. And he was right. In man there still lives the germ of goodness, which, surviving the fall, allies him to his Maker. Human life, like the sea, is black, but each human soul, like each separate water-drop, in God's light is white.

But his silence was unavailing, for a week later he received another letter showing that a crisis threatened Ashleigh. It was from Slopingdale, and read,—

*“The hounds have found him.*

“SWAMPUS.”

And now a few more years come and go and we see a picture. On one of the aristocratic avenues of New York stands a beautiful mansion, a house wide and high, of the olden style, its many windows throwing a blaze of light at night far into and up and down the street, while through the open doorway now and then come glimpses

of a paradise within like a vision of enchantment. This is the home of the Hon. Harry Ashleigh. Here in this half-darkened room is his library, a wonderful collection of rare works filling the cases ranged around the four walls of the room. His easy-chair drawn up before the cheerful grate awaits him. The drawing-rooms open out before the gaze on either hand, filled with rich upholstery, works of art, blooming flowers, and singing birds. The fire-light falls upon and tints the Turkish luxury of the richly-furnished rooms with a warm glow. Draw those ample laces aside and you will see a carriage at the door, the blooded horses restlessly champing their bits. Mr. Ashleigh is home now from the last session of the Legislature of his State, of which honored body he is, *videtur*, a member. That music you hear comes from the farther parlor, where a lady is playing an old love-song. How sweet is that melody, and how it creeps through the senses into the heart! The music ceases, and, entering through the open door, we see Ashleigh and his wife coming towards us, his arm laid lightly about her waist and she looking up into his face smiling. She is little changed. She looks still as beautiful as when she was called Lilian Worthington years ago, her eyes retaining all the old magnetic power and her hair its pristine beauty, brown in the shade and golden in the

sun. But Ashleigh looks older and sadder than when we saw him last. There is a strange look in his eyes that speaks of tension of mind and watchfulness. Perhaps the cares of business and the weight of honors oppress him. He smiles now and his face lights up with the expression of old days. It may be that he is really happy. And why not? Is not his life fortunate? Has he not achieved success? Did he not accomplish his mission? Does not the world honor him at last?

And now, behold, here is another home in the great West, where a little cottage stands on the edge of a wonderful city. Around it, within a fence of hedge, are gardens, trees, grass, and flowers. It is a modest, unpretentious home, the home of William Smith. In the city, where he labors at his profession, he is known simply as "Bill Smith, the lawyer." And the familiar title is appropriate enough, for he moves in a quiet, patient way in and out of court and among the people busied in doing his duty. He has a reputation. Is it a reputation for greatness? No. Only a reputation for careful, honest work, for generosity, good fellowship, being kind to the unfortunate, helpful to the needy, obliging to the people, and just to all. He lives an upright, moral, manly life. But he has attained to no worldly honors.

How different is the life we live from that we thought to live when we were young !

The day fades away, and the evening shades begin to cover the gray earth, and as the twilight crowns the west with a halo of purple, crimson, and gold, William Smith comes up the walk leading to his home and enters the gate to the garden where a smiling face and a woman's love meet him with a kiss. As he enters the garden a little child runs towards him and climbs about his neck, and he stops to fondle its pretty arms which encircle his face and to talk back to those prattling lips that so sweetly babble. God was good, and sent them another child. He called the child *Lilian*. It was a fancy, he said,—a pretty name, and he liked it. It *was* a pretty name. Jennie would never know. She never did.

And so the sun goes down, and night covers the gray earth, and the stars come out in heaven and glitter there like diamonds in the glossy blackness of a woman's hair ; and as the picture of these two homes, the one so grand and beautiful, the other so plain and humble, fades away from sight, a man sits in his humble home by the side of his wife and child and a thought steals into his mind about the past and other days, and he murmurs to himself,—

“ He married for wealth and honor, and secured both. He lives in his grand mansion surrounded

by all the aids to happiness that money and station can give,—I wonder whether he is happy?"

And at the same moment of time another man, sitting alone in his luxurious home, looks around him on all the riches of his possession with discontent and dread, and while there steals into the room the sweet air of a favorite song, the well-loved music of other days, his bosom heaves with a sigh, and he breathes to himself the thought,—

"He married for love and truth, and secured both. He is poor and lives in a cottage,—I wonder whether he is happy?"

And so the evening ends.

But early next evening the people, driving home through the parks, pause a moment to notice a bearded man standing alone on the portico of his cottage home, with bared head, looking at the sunset. And still he sees the whole of life through the golden haze of a vivid imagination, still lives in an unsubstantial world as beautiful as the mind of man ever fashioned, but as unreal as the purple mountains and gilded valleys of a summer sunset over Slopingdale. He is standing there as when a boy, looking into the eye of the glowing west, the glorified west, that, lighted with sunset splendor, had once seemed a path into heaven, and which will ever throw its lane of fire to beckon on his wandering feet. His face is radiant with hope as he gazes into the rosy sky where one star

glitters. He has not lost faith in himself, but still believes he will obtain the recognition of the world and win honorable fame. Ah, well, it may never be! It is sad to think thus, but some time the hard lesson must be learned.

But it is not altogether hard. The lesson has its comforts. For when the world bestows its dignities upon the bold and unscrupulous, while denying recognition to modest worth and unobtrusive merit, when it rewards the clarion-toned bravery of war and spoliation and ignores that higher bravery of moral courage struggling, through mute inglorious ways, to do the right, then into every gentle soul from which it takes a hope away a thousand shining virtues enter, in forms of tenderness, sensibility, sympathy, trust, patience, and love, to shine upon the world and bless it with their beauty.

Yet not to utter obscurity would the brave world consign our hero. It remembers him. It even points him out to observation. Here among trees and flowers and seats and winding walks; here upon the green lawn and under the bright sky; here, where birds sing and children play and flowers bloom and the steady stream of human life glides by, it sees him standing, his pale face lit in a nimbus of sunset glory. The great world knows the pathos of his life. It will long love to picture him standing there looking into that flaming

sky. The world will express its opinion of the man and all men who hear his story will know that,—for all his self-renunciation and perfect truth, for all his gentle life and moral bravery, for all the purity of his earnest soul—they behold, transfigured by the golden light of sunset,—  
A Prodigious Fool.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“There all are equal: side by side  
The poor man and the son of pride  
Lie calm and still.”—LONGFELLOW.

THE fire of October 9, 1871, will long be remembered in Chicago. The world has nothing to compare with it since the burning of Moscow. In the confusion and fright of the hour, amid the toppling walls and crackling timber, and the scorching heat, which shrivelled and consumed whatever it touched, but little could be done to help the suffering or save the endangered. The instinct of self-preservation dominated over men, and thousands fled the city; thousands, homeless and hungry, wandered out upon the open prairie, or, desperately, threw themselves into the lake only to drown. There were, however, many instances of heroism. On the night of the second day of the fire a young man, who had been foremost in deeds of daring to save life, was missing. A man remembered having seen him enter a burning dwelling to save a little child whose pale,

startled face looked out from a window. He saw him rush through the flames up the burning stairs,—he saw him no more. When he passed that way again the house had fallen. Next morning an examination of the spot revealed only a smouldering ruin. But a block away, sheltered by a stone wall near the river, the man was found. In the mutilated form cruelly burned they recognized Bill Smith, the lawyer. He had crawled there after saving the child, which lay asleep in his arms. They took him home maimed, blind, dying. A week later, there being no hope of his recovery, he was conveyed to Slopingdale, returning to die at thirty to the spot from whence he started thirteen years before to make a name to be trumpeted round the world. "It's a pity," said his friends, when they saw him. "He wasn't a bad man,—only a fool, poor fellow!"

When Ashleigh was fixed upon as the man they wanted, the authorities took the opinion of counsel on the subject of his arrest. The eminent lawyers, strange to say, perfectly agreed in their conclusions. They unanimously advised against his arrest. Therefore he was not arrested. Contrary to expectation and in the face of justice, the man escaped merited punishment. He did not stand in the criminal dock, but, on the contrary, received, shortly afterwards, a high position under

government. Possibly it is as well that his career should end in grandeur. There is a hereafter, and hell exists for those who deserve to be, but never are, punished in this life.

The grounds of the lawyers' advice when examined were extremely plausible. The proofs were insufficient to convict.

"He was not guilty of murder at all," argued the astute counsel for the State. "He was not an actual participant in the crime, for he wasn't present when it was committed; and as to being accessory before the fact,—employing another to do the deed,—there is no legal evidence to prove it. The confession of Sparr, his alleged accomplice, in law is not evidence against anybody except himself. To say that it is a dying declaration, and therefore evidence, will not do. Dying declarations of the man killed are admissible against the killer, but dying declarations of the killer are not admissible against an accomplice. Neither is the confession evidence on the ground of its being a declaration of one of the parties to a conspiracy, and thus proof against each and all of the conspirators, because it was not made during the progress of the conspiracy, but long after it had been accomplished and ended."

When Colonel Swampus heard this opinion he volunteered an opinion of his own. It was his belief that lawyers were rascals. "I allus thought

lawyers wuz d—d scoundrels," said the colonel, "and now I'm sure of it!"

And the Fool? Lingered in a living death. One day he called his daughter to his bedside. His wife was already there. They stood looking at him, knowing that his time had come. And then resignedly he took their hands, while his eyelids closed as if in sleep, and without a struggle his soul passed away. He is at peace. He never reached the end he aimed at, but died, as he had lived, poor and unknown. A dreamer from boyhood, an idealist in manhood, ever following the phantoms of imagination, he lived in hope and died disappointed. He was a fool. And yet his career may not be uninteresting, for his was a generous heart and a gentle soul. When the time shall come to estimate a human life at its true worth, perhaps his memory, now unnoticed, may receive its due recognition and merited love. His grave is on the hill overlooking the village of his youth, Slopingdale. There it was his wish to be buried. He loved that spot. And there beneath a marble pillar broken at the middle, as was his life, with his dead child by his side, he rests at peace at last with all the world, the marble shaft above him preserving and publishing his last words,—

"I ASPIRED TO THE STARS,  
AND DIED UNKNOWN."

From Cemetery Hill the view, as of old, is grand. The fields around are green again this May. The river slips like molten silver between the distant mountains; the village nestles against the hills, the sun shines, the birds sing, the children laugh, and nature smiles. All is joy. And motionless on the hill-side, like mere specks on the scene of gladness, a woman dressed in black, with her little daughter by her side, stand silent beside a verdant mound looking down at the green bellow at their feet, where, in the embrace of death, the active brain and generous heart no longer pained, lies at rest he who was at once the noble man, tender husband, loving father, true friend,— and Prodigious Fool.

THE END.











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